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**THE PURSUIT AND DISPELLING OF HOLY HETEROSEXUAL LOVE: FROM
“LOVE MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN” TO *WU ZI***

A Thesis Presented

By

LI LI

**Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

February 2009

Chinese

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Elly Hagaraar points out that two main themes pervade the stories and novels by Zhang Jie张洁 (1937 -).¹ One is mainly concerned with society, as in her *Heavy Wings* (*Chenzhong de chibang* 沉重的翅膀, 1981). The other theme, love, on which this thesis focuses, can be traced back to her earliest works, such as “Love Must Not Be Forgotten” (*Ai, shi buneng wangji de* 爱, 是不能忘记的, 1979; hereafter “Love”), and runs through her subsequent female works, in which female characters dominate, such as *The Ark* (*fangzhou* 方舟, 1982), *Emerald* (*Zumulü* 祖母绿, 1984), *Gone Is The Person Who Loved Me Most* (*Shijieshang zui teng wo de nage ren qu le* 世界上最疼我的那个人去了, 1994; hereafter *Gone*), and *Without Words* (*Wu Zi* 无字, 1998; hereafter *Wu Zi*) - the sixth Mao Dun Literary Prize Winning (2005) masterpiece, with which Zhang Jie is most satisfied.

Actually, concern for social and political issues, not just women’s interests, especially love and marriage, have been common features² among contemporary women writers of mainland China since the booming of the New Literature of the 1919 May Fourth Movement.

¹ Hagaraar, Elly. “Some Recent Literary Works by Zhang Jie: A Stronger Emphasis on Personal Perspective.” *China Information* 10.1 (1995): 59-71.

² Li, Ziyun. “The Disappearance and Revival of Feminine Discourse” in *Critical Studies Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature* (Vol.18). Eds. Chen, Peng-hsiang & Whiney Crothers Dilley. Amsterdam – New York, NY, 2002, p. 122.

Among Chinese women writers of the 1920s, it was Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986) who first expressed an awareness of the sexual inequality underlying patriarchal oppression through her stories from the late 1920s and the 1930s, with “Miss Sophia’s Diary” (Sufei nüshi de riji 苏菲女士的日记) as its representative. In the 1930s, the Anti-Japanese War became the most dominant theme. Mao Zedong’s 1942 Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Arts made the slogan “Literature for National Defense” imperative. The emphasis on belligerence and the policy of culture and literature serving the interest of workers, peasants, and soldiers silenced the women’s voices led by Ding Ling. This situation was aggravated after 1949, until 1978 or 1979 when, at the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists, Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904-1997) called for an emancipation of thought and the smashing of spiritual shackles. From the 1930s to 1978, although female consciousness and women’s writing were repressed, there were still a couple of talented women writers whose voices did break through the repression of female consciousness.

Xiao Hong 萧红 (1911-1942) from the 1930s, in her *The Field of Life and Death* (*Shengsi Chang* 生死场), set during the Japanese invasion, conveyed a sense of sadness, loneliness and helplessness through her descriptions of the scary scenes of a woman’s delivery of a child. The arrival of one new life means the death of the mother. So a woman’s body is actually a field of life and death, the place where life encounters death. Writing from a female’s point of view, Xiao Hong expressed her particular concern about the fate of women, who, because of male cruelty and indifference, bore an extra burden of suffering over and above what they shared with the men.

Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) 张爱玲 (1919-1995) enjoyed a burst of productivity between 1943 and 1945 while living in Japanese-occupied Shanghai with a vacuum on the literary scene. Deadly decay prevailing, her pen touches the inner lives of her heroines with deep insights. And her incisive and vivid description of the fate of women, whose mentality is distorted and humanity stifled, from a female's point of view, is amazingly impressive. C.T. Hsia points out that "Eileen Chang deals with a society in transition, where the only constants are the egoism in every bosom and the complementary flicker of love and compassion."³

"The Red Beans" (Hongdou 红豆) written in 1958 by Zong Pu 宗璞 (1928-) can be viewed as the last of the female voices. It tells a sad story of a female university student, who sacrificed love for the sake of the 1949 revolution. When the heroine later happened to see the red beans, symbol of her love, she could do nothing but express her pain. Actually, the conflict between romantic love and revolutionary duty has been a literary convention which can be traced back to Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) or earlier. As we can see either in Ba Jin's 巴金 (1904-2005) or Ding Ling's novels, whenever any conflict between revolution and love occurs, women are always required to sacrifice for the former. The story was labeled a "poisonous weed" and the author was accused of propagating bourgeois sentiments and forbidden to write for many years.

In the climate of relative openness that followed the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the emotional toll of social problems increasingly became the province of fiction during 1976-1982.⁴ Many authors, especially female writers, began to turn inward again and examine the emotional lives of Chinese women, with an emphasis on the importance of

³ Hsia, C.T. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. Third edition. Indiana University Press, 1999, p.396.

⁴ Yue, Daiyun and Carolyn Wakeman. "Review: Women in Recent Chinese Fiction – A Review Article." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 42:4, No.4. (Aug.1983): 881.

love in marriage. However, the inner world was still considered the subject matter of bourgeois individualism. Many stories written by women, that searchingly examine female emotional needs, have received far less official approval than those addressing officially acknowledged public problems.

From the above, we can say that Zhang Jie is not unique in dealing with this very common theme, love, and concern for women's fate was not initiated by her either. But Zhang Jie, in her "Love", for the first time asserted that love belongs to every human being, not the bourgeoisie alone, and Chinese women, who were oppressed for so long, should stand up for their fundamental rights. In addition, we have to admit that the aggregate of her love stories is amazingly fascinating because she has made a very common theme take on a unique look – a reflection of her unique soul. I'll elaborate on her uniqueness later.

Outline of the thesis:

- A brief biographical sketch of Zhang Jie 张洁 (1937 -).

The main part of this section will discuss the deep influences of her eventful fatherless life experience, traditional Chinese culture, as well as that of 18th and 19th Western classical literature on her literary creation, characterized by a high sense of social responsibility and spirituality. It will be preceded by a life sketch of Zhang Jie based on Else Unterrieder's interview-based article ⁵ and Zhang Jie's collection of prose.⁶

- Zhang Jie's changing perspectives on love, specifically, sensual love and maternal love.

I will examine Zhang Jie's major writings where the dominant characters are females. They are "Love", *The Ark*, *Emerald*, *Gone*, and *Wu Zi*.

- The main part consists of my translation of the first two chapters of Vol.1 of Zhang Jie's three-volume masterpiece, *Wu Zi*.

⁵ Unterrieder, Else. "New Wings for Chinese Literature: Zhang Jie and Her work." *Haishi zou hao: Chinese poetry, drama and literature* (1989): 193-215.

⁶ Zhang, Jie 张洁 (1937-). *Cisheng nanzai* 此生难再 [This Life Never Returns]. Guangzhou 广州 :Guangzhou chubanshe 广州出版社, 2001.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ZHANG JIE 张洁 (1937 -)

Zhang Jie 张洁 was born in Beijing on April 27, 1937. When she was only 100 days old, her father, who served in the North-Eastern Army under Zhang Xueliang 张学良 ('the Young Marshall'), abandoned her and her mother Zhang Shanzhi 张珊枝, to join a relative of his commander in Yan'an 延安, Shaanxi 陕西 Province. Zhang Jie's father worked in a circle of progressive intellectuals including Luo Binji 骆宾基 (1917-), whom he often laughed at and looked down upon, within a united-front movement initiated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). With a long-cherished wish to be a writer, in vain, due to his petty cleverness according to Zhang Jie, her father was appointed editor-in-chief around 1952 at the People's Literature Publishing House. During the 1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign, he was severely criticized. So the only thing that Zhang Jie owes him is the handicap of being the daughter of a "rightist". It was her mother, originally a primary school teacher, who not only brought up Zhang Jie, and her only daughter Tang Di 唐棣 from her first marriage, all by herself, but also put her through university, and helped nurture her into becoming a well-known writer. Consequently, Zhang Jie adopted her mother's family name, because, to her, her mother is her father.

Under impoverished circumstances, Zhang Jie's mother took her to Tainjin 天津 where she worked as a *baomu* (house-helper) in the household of a Zhang family for about four years. When Pearl Harbor was attacked in December 1941, Zhang Jie's

mother took her to Guilin 桂林, Guang Xi 广西 Province. Luo Binji followed and lodged with Zhang Jie's mother, who took care of him after the death of Xiao Hong whom he accompanied during her last 44 days. Luo Binji played a very important role in both Zhang Jie's life and literary career. Zhang Jie said that Luo Binji was the person who helped her write her first novel and gave her a lot more than her own father in every aspect. Toward the end of the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), Zhang Jie's mother took her to a remote mountain village in the province of Shaanxi 陕西 and lived there for about ten years (1944-1954). It was extremely important for Zhang Jie's intellectual development, as she was taught by qualified teachers from Beijing who had also come to the village to take shelter from the war. Even more so, Zhang Jie was particularly fortunate because one of her teachers had brought with him a good supply of Chinese literature and Western classics, which played a very important role in her later literary creation. He also played the harmonium, and encouraged his pupils' interest in music. Zhang Jie gave credit to this teacher for her love of literature and music.

Zhang Jie finished primary school in 1949. After frequent changes of teachers at lower middle school, and one full year (1952-1953) spent at home due to a pulmonary disease, she continued her studies on her own and was able to attend a senior high school in Liaoning 辽宁 (1954-1956), the home province of Zhang Jie's mother. With the help of a relative of her mother, who was working in the provincial Ministry of Culture there, Zhang Jie was later re-allocated to a key high school in Fushun 抚顺 with excellent teaching and facilities, which was of great importance to her further education.

After graduation from high school, Zhang Jie wanted to study literature at Beijing University, but was persuaded by her teachers to study economics as being of more use to

New China. Upon her graduation from the People's University (1956-1960) with a degree in economics, she was appointed to a position on the economic planning committee of Zhengzhou 郑州, Henan 河南 Province. Her first marriage to a singer in 1964, took her from Henan to the First Ministry of Industry in Beijing. The experience – a background unmatched by any of her peers in China--made her well equipped to write *Heavy Wings* because these years provided her with not only a thorough study of works on political economy and philosophy but she also gained valuable insights into the problems of industry and the working methods of ministries. But Zhang Jie admits modestly that the main reason for her writing *Heavy Wings* was that 爱屋及乌 “love for a person extends even to the crows on his roof”, which means she tried her best to please her second and current husband Sun Youyu 孙友余, the Vice Minister of the First Ministry of Industry in Beijing at that time rather than that she was good at dealing with social issues. He lorded over, and was worshipped by, Zhang Jie since they married in 1986, and he threw the remainder of her life into endless misery.

Her experience was supplemented by three years (1969-1972) of “re-education” in a cadre school in Jiangxi 江西 Province at 32 years old. Based on an article by James C. F. Wang,⁷ from its establishment on 8 November, 1968, to January 1973, appropriately 3,300 cadres from eastern Beijing graduated from the May Seventh Cadre School. The average age of the participants was about 35 years, which means that they were in their early teens when the CCP came to power. There was an orientation study program prior to school attendance which emphasized continuous hard work and training to affect a change in their outlook, rather than “doing what one pleases”. This implies that an

⁷ Wang. James C. F. “The May Seventh Cadre School for Eastern Peking.” *The China Quarterly*, No. 63 (Sep., 1975), pp. 522-527. Cambridge University Press.

individual's highest fulfillment in life comes from serving the collective, the society, well. At that time, the cadres including Zhang Jie, as well as many other people, sincerely believed in, and took to heart, the messages taught in cadre schools. A firm believer in socialism and Marxism, Zhang Jie does not condemn the Cultural Revolution wholesale, and does not seek to reveal intrinsic weaknesses in Marxist thought. Unlike many younger writers, Zhang Xinxin for example, Zhang Jie is unwilling to endorse individualistic solutions at the expense of social responsibility, in spite of her socialist and Marxist education. In addition, Zhang Jie admits that her generation has been strongly influenced by the duty-laden Russian literature.

In the introduction to *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*, Robert Hegel stresses the importance of duty and social function in defining an individual's identity in Chinese literature.⁸ Zhang Jie's female characters combine dedication to their work and a high social responsibility, like Zhang Jie herself. Note that Zhang Jie was born in 1937 at the onset of the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), reached adulthood in the climate of the pragmatic 1950s, and was a mature adult at the time of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). A sense of social responsibility and the effort to establish this as a social norm is, Zhang Jie seems to be saying, a vital ingredient in the making of a humane society. The reason Zhang lets her characters assume too much responsibility for their conditions is that Zhang herself, in real life, had to take various familial and societal responsibilities.⁹ For example, Tian Ye 田野 in "Who Knows How to Live?" 谁生活得更美好 (1979), is "very meticulous about selling tickets", "Rain or shine she did her job with equal

⁸ Hegel, Robert E. and Richard C. Hessney, eds. *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press (1985): 7 and 16.

⁹ Zhang, Jie 张洁 (1937-). *Shijieshang zuiteng wo de nageren qu le* 世界上最疼我的那个人去了. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1994.

perseverance.”¹⁰ Zeng Ling'er 曾令儿 in *Emerald* “would be able to work with Zuo Wei . And it wasn't out of love or hatred for him, nor out of pity for Beihe. It was for this society, to do something that had some meaning.”¹¹ The three female protagonists in *The Ark*, apart from finding or looking for meaning, in their work, place great emphasis on their perceived duty to society and find inspiration there to continue struggling.¹²

Besides the sense of social responsibility mentioned above, some critics discussing Zhang Jie's works dealing with love and marriage, such as Xu Wenyu¹³ 许文郁 from the People's Republic of China, and Rosemary Roberts,¹⁴ an Australian, have noticed that under Zhang Jie's pen, love relationships and happy marriages, either guardian-ward relationships (Roberts' term), or *laofu shaoqi* 老夫少妻 [older husband, younger wife] (Xu's term), are almost all very non-sexual in nature. Xu goes further than Roberts in her analysis of Zhang Jie's non-sexual marriage patterns.

First, Xu thinks that Zhang's lack of paternal love led to her long-cherished hidden desire for an immaculate father in shining armor, characterized by a combination of integrity and benevolence, a lofty spiritual mental outlook, and high-ranking position like the old cadre in “Love”, or Zheng Ziyun 郑子云 in *Heavy Wings*, or Zhu

¹⁰ Zhang, Jie 张洁 (1937-). “Who Knows How to Live” in *Love must not be forgotten (Ai, shi buneng wangji de* 爱, 是不能忘记的, 1979). Trans. Gladys Yang, et al. San Francisco: China Books & Periodicals; Beijing: Panda Books, c1986, p.101.

¹¹ Zhang, Jie 张洁 (1937-). *Zhang Jie xiaoshuo xuan* 张洁小说选 (*Selected Stories by Zhang Jie*). Beijing: Zhongguo wenxue chubanshe 中国文学出版社, Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe 外语教学与研究出版社, 1999, p.236.

¹² Zhang, *Ark* in *Love*, 114, 145, 146, 168.

¹³ Xu, Wenyu 许文郁. Postscript (1989) to *Zhang Jie de xiaoshuo shijie* 张洁的小说世界. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1991.

¹⁴ Roberts, Rosemary A. “Images of Women in the Fiction of Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin”. *The China Quarterly* 120 (Dec. 1989): 800-813.

Zhenxiang 朱桢祥 in *The Ark*. Besides, the failure of Zhang's first marriage and her lord-slave like second and current marriage reinforced her longing and worship for a father-like husband.¹⁵

Second, Zhang Jie's creation of her love-marriage stories has been strongly influenced by traditional Chinese culture. Zhang Jie was accused of being spoilt by Western literature as early as her student days at university. She acknowledges that the literary sources that have had the most influence on her have not only been Western but Chinese as well. Chinese traditional novels dealing with sensual love fall roughly into two categories. One, from the physical perspective, depicts sensual rivalry, with *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 as its representative; the other tends to present spiritual entanglement, such as the love between Jia Baoyu 贾宝玉 and Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 in *Honglou Meng* 红楼梦. These two kinds of love have been incompatible just like fire and water. The former has been held in contempt by scholars, while the latter has been admired by many people, and it is to this latter category that the love depicted by Zhang Jie belongs.

Finally, Zhang Jie's emphasis on the spiritual aspect of sensual love results from the enormous influence of the former Russian literary masters, especially Anton Chekhov (1860-1904). During her childhood, Zhang Jie read many Russian literary works in translation, and Chekhov has been her spiritual mentor and guide in her literary creation. We can say that the major motifs of Zhang Jie's novels, the pursuit of the all-round emancipation of the human spirit, and seeking the aim of "creating a literature that

¹⁵ Zhang Jie. "可怜天下女人心" [Alas! Women's Hearts!] in *Cisheng nanzai* 此生难再 [This Life Never Returns]. Guangzhou 广州: Guangzhou chubanshe 广州出版社, 2001, p194.

advocates human dignity...sympathy...and the beauty of human nature,¹⁶ are direct successors of the main theme of Chekhov's works – Man is supposed to live a dignified life.

In “Love”, the daughter/narrator reminds us that her mother treasured a set of *Selected Stories of Chekhov*, just as Zhang Jie herself does.¹⁷ The daughter was puzzled by the way her mother never tired of reading Chekhov for over twenty years. However, Chekhov's readers may not be so puzzled. For Chekhov depicts the painful conditions imposed on women of the intelligentsia, women who lead discontented, frustrated lives just like that of the mother in “Love”. Chekhov is thus “the spokesman of our tormented intelligentsia, our aspiring girls and women.”¹⁸ His advocacy of true love inspires his female characters to transcend banal, everyday life and react against the existing conditions of life. Perhaps that is why the mother always seemed bewitched by Chekhov's books, as does Zhang Jie.

In addition, Zhang Jie regards money and time as two prerequisites for modern women's literature, the notion most often attributed to Virginia Woolf -- “All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.-Ch. 1”¹⁹

¹⁶ Duke, Michael S. *Blooming and contending: Chinese literature in the post-Mao era*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1985. p.50.

¹⁷ Zhang Xinxin张辛欣 (1953 -). “Sisui, sisui, sisui le shi pinjie” 撕碎, 撕碎, 撕碎了是拼接, in *Zhang Jie yanjiu zhuanji*张洁研究专集. Ed. He Huoren何火任. Guizhou贵州: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 1991, pp. 76-91.

¹⁸ Maegd-shoep, Carolina De. *Chekhov and Women: Women in the Life and Work of Chekhov*. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1988, p. 16.

¹⁹ Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Book-of-the-Month, 1992.

It seems to me that Virginia Woolf and Zhang Jie also have something in common in mentality. Woolf frankly referred to herself as ‘mad’; said she heard voices and had visions. “My own brain is to me the most unaccountable of machinery—always buzzing, humming, soaring roaring diving, and then buried in mud. And why? What’s this passion for?” (from a letter dated 28 Dec. 1932). And Wu Wei, obviously Zhang Jie, in *Wu Zi*, got mad...and “在重要的关节上，吴为总能于冥冥中看到什么文字或是形象” (p.3) [“At crucial moments, Wu Wei can always see some apt words or visions in her gloom.”]

In December 1978, Zhang Jie undertook her first tentative efforts in writing. “The Music of the Forests” 森林里来的孩子 won first prize for the national best short story of the year 1978. 1979 saw another prize winning short story, “Who Lives the More Beautiful Life?” From 1980 to 1982, she worked as a script writer in the Beijing Film Studios where she worked on two film scripts, “The Search” and “We Are Still Young”, which were never released to the public. Since 1982, she has been able to devote herself exclusively to writing. In 1983, “The Time Is Not Yet Ripe” 条件尚未成熟 won her the national best short story for the third time. *Emerald* won the national best novella of 1983-1984. *Heavy Wings* and *Wu Zi*, won China’s second and sixth Mao Dun Literary Prize in 1985 and 2005 respectively. As of today, Zhang Jie is the only writer who has won China’s national prizes for short story, novella, and novel writing. She is also the only Chinese writer who twice won the Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) Literary Prize, one of the highest literary awards in China established in 1981 for novel writing.

As a member of both the Beijing Writers’ Association and the China Writers’ Association, Zhang Jie won the Italy Malaparte International Literary Prize in 1989. Moreover, she was elected Honorary Academician by the Academy of Literature and Art

of the United States in February 1992. Now she is a regular participant in the bi-annual conferences in America on American and Chinese literature.

CHAPTER 3

THE PURSUIT AND DISPELLING OF HOLY HETEROSEXUAL LOVE: FROM “LOVE” TO *WU ZI*

Zhang Jie’s definition of love is much broader than that expressed through romantic male-female attachments. Due to her life experiences, maternal love gradually plays a dominating role in both her personal life and her literary works.

In her female writings Zhang artistically, and thus protectively, blends fact and fiction, which is her “soul’s autobiography”,²⁰ and which to her is an ideal tool for giving vent to her own pent-up feelings. The assemblage of the above-mentioned works thus brings into focus Zhang Jie’s change of perspective on sensual love and parental love (in her case maternal love), her unbreakable and increasingly strong mother-daughter bond, as well as her own emotional and literary growth and maturity through her creation of a colorful gallery of female images. To be exact, Zhang Jie, in her love/female texts, has expressed her persistent pursuit of the holy, near religious, heterosexual love in “Love” and *Emerald*, her disillusionment with heterosexual love in *The Ark*, her despair in heterosexual love in *Gone*, and her detachment from heterosexual love in *Wu Zi*. Differently put, Zhang Jie’s above-mentioned works, with middle-aged women intellectuals as their heroines, display her views on women from a female’s perspective and demonstrate the course of her process in searching for or looking up to ideal men, to

²⁰ Liu, Chun, and Huang Lin刘春 荒林. “Zhang Jie: Ta de chibang bu chenzhong” 张洁: 她的翅膀不沉重 [Zhang Jie: Her Wings Are Not Heavy]. *Beijing Qingnian Zhoukan* 北京青年周刊 [Beijing Youth Weekly], 2005. Zhang Jie said in this interview that [For any artist, including musicians, painters, and writers as well, if you assemble all their works, they can be seen as the autobiographies of their souls] 对任何艺术家来说, 包括音乐家、画家、作家等等, 把他们一生的作品综合起来看, 都应该说是他们灵魂的自传.

ridiculing or looking down upon men, and to objectively evaluating or looking squarely at men while dissecting the negative traits of women, including lack of solidarity among themselves.

Pursuit and persistence of holy love in “Love” and *Emerald*

Any artist's work is, more or less, a self-expression. The aggregate of Zhang Jie's literary works can mirror her own life experience and her psychological course 心路历程. Just as Ning Zongyi 宁宗一 claims²¹ that “Literature, in essence, is a science of man's soul and personality. And the history of literature from the perspective of an organic whole, is the lifelike and exquisite history of a heart” 文学实质上是人的灵魂学和人的性格学, 而一部文学发展史, 从有机整体的观念来看, 它是一部生动的, 形象的, 细腻的 ‘心史’.

Zhang Jie's fatherless living environment strongly influenced her writing, which resulted in a striking feature found in most of her works -- the absence of the father.²² In a single-parent family such as Zhang Jie's, and the ones she portrays in “Love” and *Emerald*, the child, both the daughter Shanshan 珊珊 and Zeng Ling'er's illegitimate son Taotao 陶陶, obviously Zhang Jie herself who was both mother and father for her only daughter - Tang Di, has no opportunity to witness a real relationship between husband

²¹ Ning, Zong-yi 宁宗一. “Guanyu gudai zuojia de xintai yanjiu” 关于古代作家的心理研究. *Wenxue yichan* 文学遗产 5(1997):4-9.

²² Hagenaar, Elly. “Some Recent Literary Works by Zhang Jie: A Stronger Emphasis on Personal Perspective.” *China Information* 10.1 (1995): 69.

and wife, either loving or loveless. She has no role model for the give-and-take required to maintain such a relationship on a daily basis, so that both Zhang Jie and Zeng Ling'er tend to develop a vague ideal image of love, but are unsuccessful in their own love lives because [Zeng Ling'er] "couldn't understand women who passively enjoyed their husbands' love without giving anything of themselves" and "she was incapable of teasing" with men, also.²³

In the case of Zhang Jie, such idealism led to the unsuccessful management of her first short marriage, and her second marriage which she describes as follows:

I only think wholeheartedly about how I can give him [her husband] an even better life. That is why my daughter says: 'Mother, your whole life you have been like a horse that only knows about working; you have never enjoyed yourself.'...I have been greatly changed by the hard life I have had....But now I have developed a kind of fear and suspicion in regard to men – I am weary and try to avoid them....This frame of mind is often reflected in my novels. Some critics in China say: 'From Zhang Jie's work you can see she hates men.... If people draw the conclusion from my work that I am a feminist, then that is perhaps because my work expresses my dream about things I do not possess in real life. This may have something to do with my experiences. I grew up in a family without men.'²⁴

In "Love", the heroine/mother/writer, Zhong Yu 钟雨, has been waiting persistently for an ideal, purely spiritual love. Throughout her life she has been in love with a Chinese Communist party cadre, who, out of a sense of duty and gratitude to the dead as well as for deep class feelings, married the daughter of his lifesaver during the revolutionary war. However, she retained a profound love, resulting from her worship for this man who can only return her love at a distance. After he was persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution, she longed to "join him in heaven"²⁵ even though they had never even shaken

²³ Zhang, Jie 张洁 (1937-). *Emerald in Zhang Jie xiaoshuo xuan* 张洁小说选 (*Selected Stories by Zhang Jie*). Beijing: Zhongguo wenxue chubanshe 中国文学出版社, Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe 外语教学与研究出版社, 1999, p156.

²⁴ Chong, Woei Lien. "The Position of Women in China: A Lecture by Woman Writer Zhang Jie." *China Information* 10.1 (Summer 1995): 57. The quotation is from Chong's "Position".

²⁵ Zhang Jie's daughter has been living in the United States since 1984, based on her *Gone Is the Person Who Loved Me Most*. My guess is that Zhang Jie has been strongly influenced by Christianity or some other

hands. Under the influence of her mother, the daughter/narrator is also determined to pursue her soul mate.

The theme of holy love continues in Zhang Jie's novella *Emerald*. It gives us an opportunity to experience two overlapping plots, which shows a depth in Zhang Jie's writings that reflects her literary maturity. The outer story is about a young couple on their honeymoon when the groom suddenly drowns at sea. The inner one, the main plot, concerns another love story of the female protagonist Zeng Ling'er who tried her very best to protect her once beloved man Zuo Wei 左巍, and thereby threw herself into endless misery. Zeng Ling'er's burning love for Zuo Wei, made her first offer to be a political scapegoat for him and then willingly endure endless humiliation and hardships, including loss of her illegitimate son as an unwed mother. But she never thinks of what she did for Zuo Wei as sacrifice, because to her "If you love, don't describe it as a sacrifice".²⁶ and she holds that as long as one experiences love that has been reciprocated, even one day of that love is enough. It is quite clear that Zhang Jie wishes to emphasize the sublime, almost religious nature of Zeng Ling'er's love through the following description when she became the target of public criticism:

She wore a little smile...with an unworldly joy she looked at Zuo Wei standing in a corner with his head hung low...She could think of nothing but the man she loved...She would gladly sacrifice everything for him...Later Beihe had got a photograph of Ling'er at that meeting...Apart from pictures of martyrs she remembered from church in her childhood, she had never seen any portrait with such a saintly expression.²⁷

We can see that Zhang Jie displayed a strong romantic tendency influenced by 18th and 19th century novels from the West. The above complementary description of Zeng

religion like Buddhism that has such terms as 'heaven' and 'God'. She used *tiantang* 天堂 'heaven' in her original work in Chinese. Moreover, the title of her novella *Ark* (*Fangzhou* 方舟) is Biblical.

²⁶ Zhang, Jie 张洁 (1937-). *Zhang Jie xiaoshuo xuan* 张洁小说选 (*Selected Stories by Zhang Jie*). Beijing: Zhongguo wenxue chubanshe 中国文学出版社, Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe 外语教学与研究出版社, 1999, p222.

²⁷ Zhang, *Xiaoshuo*, 110-112.

Ling'er's saintly image of standing with an unworldly joy on the podium as the scapegoat for her ex-lover in a criticism meeting is very similar to that of Sydney Carton's going to the guillotine and dying for Lucie Manette in the place of his rival Charles Darnay, fulfilling his promise to her that he would die "to keep a life you love beside you." in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) by Charles Dickens (1812-1870). Just before Sydney dies, he thinks to himself that his final act "is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known." Crude, frequently drunk, and often melancholy, still he is capable of feeling deep, immense, and tragic love that others cannot see. His one moment of grace comes in a single selfless act that ultimately renders him the hero of the book. Many readers, and Dickens himself, found Sydney Carton's self-sacrifice to be extremely moving.

It occurs to me that before Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) drowned herself in the River Ouse near her home in Sussex by putting rocks in her coat pockets, she had left two similar suicide notes, one possibly written a few days earlier before an unsuccessful attempt. The one addressed to her husband, Leonard Woolf (1880-1969), read in part:

Dearest, I feel certain I am going mad again....And I shan't recover this time.....I am doing what seems the best thing to do....I can't fight any longer....Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can't go on spoiling your life any longer....I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been. V.

Please note that works of many successful Victorian authors of the time, who were regular visitors to Woolf's bustling home in Hyde Park, including Charles Dickens's and Thackeray's were part of her home education. Obviously, Ling'er's self-sacrifice out of burning love for her ex-lover is directly or indirectly from Dickens. I somewhat mix Zhang Jie, Ling'er, Sydney and Woolf together for their similar sacrifice for the sake of their beloved.

The disillusionment with love in *The Ark*²⁸

The publication of *The Ark* marked a change in Zhang Jie's point of view about love and man-woman relationships. We begin to sense the disappearance of Zhang Jie's passion and her fairy longing for ideal love and life, as proclaimed in the epigraph, "You will be especially unfortunate because you are a woman" (你将格外不幸, 因为你是女人). At this point, Zhang Jie fell down to the Earth from Heaven, changed from a happy and classical idealist into a cynical and wretched realist, and she began to ridicule men for their lowliness in either their aesthetic tastes for women or personal qualities.

Set in the late 1970s and early 1980's, praised as the first feminist work in post-Mao mainland China, *The Ark* presents the inner struggles of three professional women, two divorced and one separated, who were relegated to the "lowest cast in society",²⁸ bond by ties of friendship, support and mutual trust. Zhang Jie's depiction of her female protagonists as divorcees or separated is reflective of a particular phenomena of that time -- the problems of being divorced or separated in a culture that remains predominantly family-centered and looks upon divorces with suspicion and hostility, and is undergoing a substantial rise in the divorce rate in mainland China during the post-1975 years.²⁹

²⁸ Zhang, Jie张洁. *The Ark* (Fanzhou方舟). *Harvest* (Shouhuo收获) 2 (1982): 4-59. In *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, Beijing: Panda Books, 1986, p.123.

²⁹ Xu, Xiaoqun. "The Discourse on Love, Marriage, and Sexuality in Post-Mao China." *Positions* 4, No.2 (Fall 1996): 385.

Through Liu Quan, one of her female characters, Zhang Jie expresses her sober-minded and realistic view of marriage and women's innate quality or weakness:

Get married! That wasn't such an easy matter! ... Nowadays, even young girls found it hard to get themselves married, so how could a forty-year-old divorcee like herself [also Zhang Jie who remarried in 1986 at 49 years old]. As people get older they become clearer about some things, and one realization is about how difficult marriage is. They begin to see marriage as a tragedy or, if not a tragedy, a lottery in which only a few meet fortune.

But women, unlike men, must always find some object for their affections, as if loving were their sole purpose. Without love their lives would lose all joy."³⁰

Through Jinghua, Zhang Jie expresses her confusion about man-woman communication:

She was actually aware that she would never again know what it was to be loved by a man...it seems as if all three of them were separated from men by some unbridgeable chasm. Was it because men were historically more advanced than women – so that they could no longer find any basis for communication? Well, if this was the case, then neither men nor women could really be blamed. No one could help or change the historical circumstances which had gone into creating these positions."³¹

Because of the above sad and confused feelings about their miserable status quo, the final scene of the novel – where the three women are together for the first time within the scope of the narrative, for a meal at Jinghua and Liu Quan's apartment -- emphasizes the need for solidarity with all women. Through Liang Qian's proposal – "I drink a toast for women!" we witness a progression from individual thought to a collective consciousness. The progression of the narrative develops from the initial indirectly rendered thoughts of the individual characters to the final voices of a group of women struggling to create their individual and collective identities in a community. Susan Lanser points out that "This movement towards community is not only psychological but ideological, and it is the

³⁰ Zhang, *Love*, 140.

³¹ Zhang, *Love*, 154.

recognition of shared experience that forges the unity.”³² just as a famous Chinese saying goes *tongbing xianglian* 同病相怜 (“those who have the same illness sympathize with each other” -- fellow sufferers commiserate with each other). Phillip S.Y. Sun has noted men’s insecurity regarding their ability to survive, and hence their need to join sworn brotherhoods in order to find a measure of security. But women neither develop a support structure nor a sense of solidarity.³³ Sensing the fantasy of sensual love, Zhang Jie visualizes female bonding through sisterhood as a positive substitute for romantic love and marriage,³⁴ which is unique to Zhang Jie among her peers.

Sylvia Chan points out that from “Love” to *Emerald*, the line of development of Zhang Jie’s female protagonists goes from internalization of male dominance, via protest at male standards, to self-discovery, forming a completed journey to maturity.³⁵ Unlike the protagonists in *The Ark* who got married out of necessity, the No.1 female character in *Emerald* rejected her ex-lover’s marriage proposal which she thinks is out of his gratitude for her saving his life rather than out of real love. Now that an ideal love is unattainable, she is willing to choose her own life style and ends up never marrying, which is consistent with “Love”. When returning to her hometown after twenty years’ absence, she decides to accept the position as her ex-lover’s assistant, not out of love or

³² Lanser, Susan Sniader. *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992: 266.

³³ Sun, Phillip S.Y. “The Seditious Art of the Water Margin – Mysogynists or Desperadoes?” in *Renditions*, 1 (1973), p. 103.

³⁴ Liu, Lydia. “Invention and Intervention: The Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature.” *Gender Politics in Modern China*, ed. Tani E. Barlow, Winter 1991.

³⁵ Chan, Sylvia. “Chang Chieh’s Fiction: In Search of Female Identity. *Issues and Studies* (9), 1989: 85-104.

out of drive for power, but as an independent individual, which marks the personal growth of Ling'er, obviously her creator.

The despair in love in *Gone*

There are many powerful mother-son relationships in Chinese literature, while relationships between mothers and daughter are under-represented in pre-modern Chinese literature.³⁶

We can find mothers and daughters in Chinese literature, but prior to the 20th century, the mother-daughter relationship is rarely central to the story, and typically is not a strong one.³⁷ In modern Chinese literature, there is Ding Ling's *Mother*, which focuses on the author's mother's biography, not on the author's strong emotions. In addition, though the very heart of "Love" is the friendly and equal mother-daughter relationship, Zhang Jie presents it in a very calm way. However, *Gone* is a remarkable autobiographical novel in the form of a diary, in which the unbreakable relationship between the narrator/author and her mother is the central focus -- tinged with expressions of strong personal emotions. "This personal account of the mother's last months is unique in modern Chinese literature, in which the autobiographical treatment of the death of a parent is not a customary topic"³⁸ In her own presentation of *Gone*, Zhang Jie explained,

³⁶ Swatek, Catherine. "Mother-Daughter Tensions in Pre-Modern Chinese Drama". In *The World My Mother Gave Me*. Ed. Mandakranta Bose. (Vancouver BC: Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia, 1998).

³⁷ Birch, Cyril. *Scenes for Mandarins: The Elite Theatre of the Ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p.74.

³⁸ Hagenaar, Elly. "Some Recent Literary Works by Zhang Jie: A Stronger Emphasis on Personal Perspective." *China Information* 10.1 (1995): 64.

“The book is a memoir of my mother. It is a non-fiction novel that recounts the last few months of our lives together. It is a love story between mother and daughter.”³⁹

Zhang Jie now seems to have seen through sensual love, and consequently left her husband in the background of the novel. Unlike her former self, in its worship of and search for holy love, Zhang Jie came to realize that Mother is “the person who loved me most”, and that Mother is her sole and also ultimate emotional anchorage and spiritual refuge. She says, “I finally understand that one’s lover is changeable while mother is not” 我终于明白：爱人是可以更换的，而母亲却是唯一的。 Her mother’s death results in her “*Wannian jùihui, qingyuan yiliao*” 万念俱灰，情缘已了 [“despair in everything including man-woman love”] and awareness of maternal love over heterosexual love. To Zhang Jie, maternal love is coexistent with life, while man-woman love is merely a luxury which can only be enjoyed in easy times but cannot undertake the heavy burdens in life. As the famous Chinese sayings go, “people turn to their parents when in a bad time” 人穷则反本 and “Husband and wife are actually birds in the same forest, Each will fly in its own direction when faced with an imminent disaster” 夫妻本是同林鸟，大难来时各自飞.

The detachment from heterosexual love in *Wu Zi*

Zhang Jie once said that her life actually came to an end at the age of 54 when her mother died in 1991, and that she gained new consciousness about life. For seven years, Zhang Jie was immersed in her memory of the past, and largely disappeared from the

³⁹ This is the exact wording of a written text that Zhang Jie had prepared in English.

literary stage until the publication of *Wu Zi* in 1998. This novel presents a calm and detached Zhang Jie, a Zhang Jie who was, but is now not, sensitive and vulnerable to heterosexual love, just as Wu Wei, the No.1 heroine in *Wu Zi*, who “was no longer what she was thirty-odd years ago. She did not feel the same way as the female protagonist in the American novel *The Scarlet Letter*, who, with a capitalized scarlet letter “A” branded on her naked breast, became the target of public attack and felt shamed to death” when facing humiliations.

This masterpiece, which Zhang Jie believes is her best work ever, and for which she quotes the Chinese proverb 十年磨一剑 (“It takes ten years to grind a perfect sword”) to describe, is dedicated to her deceased mother who loved her most, and vice versa. This semi-autobiographical epic, which spans the length and breadth of China's tragic 20th century, according to Zhou Jingbo, a renowned literary critic, represents a radical departure from her earlier works which are a preparation for it, and she has really come of age as a novelist with this epic.

Wu Zi employs a stream-of-consciousness literary technique. The term, stream of consciousness, was first used in psychology by William James in his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) to denote the continuous flow of thoughts, feelings and impressions which, he believed, makes our inner lives. It seeks to portray an individual's point of view by giving the written equivalent of the character's thought processes, either in a loose interior monologue, or in connection to his or her sensory reactions to external occurrences. Stream-of-consciousness writing is strongly associated with Modernist literature which was at its height from 1910 to 1920, and featured many authors including Virginia Woolf. The introduction of the term to describe literature, transferred from

psychology, is attributed to May Sinclair (1863 - 1946). In *Wu Zi*, place, time, and narrative voice shift so frequently that the narrator's voice needs to appear from time to time to keep the audience from becoming confused.

Besides the main characters, it portrays people in various trades: government officials, military commanders, merchants, artisans and workers. All try very hard to pursue their own ideals: riches, love, power, etc., and at the end of their life, each one asks the simple question: Was it worth it? The answer is: It is worthless. We might interpret Wu Wei 吴为 as a pun on 无为, literally "do nothing" – a basic concept in Taoism, understood as implying no unusual action rather than complete passivity. But what the author really means, in my opinion, is that life is actually a circle from nihility to nihility. All one's efforts turn out to be for nothing. So the pursuit of love or self-realization of Zhang Jie's earlier female protagonists such as Zhong Yu in "Love", Zeng Ling'er, and the three protagonists in *The Ark* is merely meaningless struggle. Compared to her old self before her mother died, a perseverant yet vulnerable fighter with a never-give-up spirit, Zhang Jie is now harm-proof and has obtained a crystal clear perspective. She presents a calm and objective analysis of her blood-is-thicker-than-water mother-daughter bond and holds a mild, detached tone towards man-woman attachment. For example, Zhang Jie believes that it would have been much better for both Wu Wei and Ye Lianzi if their love had other channels as outlets, which would prevent their love from being a heavy burden to both of them.

Wu Zi unfolds along two intertwined plots, which is similar to *Emerald*. The novel starts with the miserable situation of a writer, Wu Wei 吴为, the No.1 heroine, (obviously Zhang Jie herself), who went insane and was sent to a hospital after her divorce. In

contrast, her divorced husband, Hu Bing-chen 胡秉宸, the No.1 hero, enjoyed his third honeymoon with his ex-wife/first wife Bai Fan 白帆, the No. 2 heroine. What follows is a calm reminiscence of their triangular relationship. Simultaneously, the other plot develops and shows the miserable lots of the three generations of women in Wu Wei's (Zhang Jie's) family. They include Wu Wei's maternal grandmother Mo He 墨盒, who was born into a comfortable family but married into a coarse peasant family, and was finally mistreated to death by her mother-in-law when Wu Wei's mother, Ye Lianzi 叶莲子, was very young.

At the start of the novel, Zhang Jie says that Wu Wei planned to write a novel. She prepared for it almost her entire life, which is parallel to Zhang Jie's preparation for *Wu Zi* in honor of her mother. But just when Wu Wei was able to start the novel, she went insane just as Zhang Jie became a *nükuangren* 女狂人⁴⁰ [a madwoman] after her mother died. The entire text is based on Wu Wei's feelings and drifting contemplation. We cannot help marveling at Zhang Jie's portrait of a little woman, Ye Lianzi, in an era of great turmoil and the revelation of her inner world. *Wu Zi* can be seen as a vivid description of traditional Chinese female lives over a long period of time. What Ye Lianzi has been longing for is the man Gu Qiushui 顾秋水, who, besides coexisting with her during a couple of years of marriage, gave nothing to her and her daughter but mistreatment and abandonment. Despite the lessons that she learned from her mother, Wu Wei, to Zhang Jie, is fated to be longing for a man named Hu Bingchen, who fell in love with her merely due to his savoring of female celebrity.

⁴⁰ Wang, Fei 王绯. "Zhang Jie: Zhuanxing yu shijiegan – yizhong wenxue nianling de duanxiang" 张洁: 转型与世界感 — 一种文学年龄的断想. *Wenxue pinglun* 文学评论 5 (1989): 62-87.

From the very outset of the 1919 May Fourth Period women writers were in league with men in their common struggle against the dark forces of feudalism. However, what they were mainly concerned were issues special to women, such as freedom in love and marriage. Though sometimes even more courageous than men, they had their innate weaknesses. Unaware of the predicaments of women and the fundamental issues in the society, their opposition to patriarchy was limited. What they were striving for was only the right to choose a man to attach themselves to. The moral we get from *Wu Zi* is that waiting and longing for a man to whom a woman tries to attach her fate, either in love or in marriage, either idealistic or realistic, is fruitless. In an interview,⁴¹ Zhang Jie defined love as “something to be seen from the distance” 一种站在远处去看的东西 and expressed that she is even unwilling to see such a thing right now. When talking about her earlier works and *Wu Zi*, Zhang Jie said,⁴² “Human beings need mythology and fairy tales.... *Wu Zi* can be seen as a deconstruction of such kind of human mythology and fairy tales” 人类需要神话和童话.... 《无字》也可以说是对这种人类神话和童话的解构. Zhang Jie, through *Wu Zi*,⁴³ “strips off human beings’ favorite mask and presents the original color of real life”. 剥离人类喜爱的面具, 呈现出生活的原色.

From “Love” to *Wu Zi*, we can see the development of Zhang Jie’s psychological course—from her pursuit and persistence of love to dispelling of man-woman love and

⁴¹ Liu, Chun, and Huang Lin 刘春 荒林. “Zhang Jie: Ta de chibang bu chenzhong” 张洁: 她的翅膀不沉重 [Zhang Jie: Her Wings Are Not Heavy. *Beijing Qingnian Zhoukan* 北京青年周刊 [Beijing Youth Weekly], 2005.

⁴² Zhang, Ying 张英. “Zhencheng de yantan – Zhang Jie fangtan lu” 真诚的言谈 — 张洁访谈录. *Beijing Wenxue* 北京文学 7 (1999): 26-28.

⁴³ *ibid.*

the gradual consciousness of overwhelming maternal love, her all-round maturity in precision of expression and a widening range of literary styles, as well as her distinct literary periods from a classical idealist to a harsh cynical realist, to a modernist, and finally keeping aloof from worldly affairs by turning to Taoism and fatalism. For example, the plot of *The Ark* is not a traditional one of resolution in which problems are solved and all ends neatly, but a modern one of revelation in which a state of affairs is laid bare and left largely unresolved.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Lodge, David. *Working With Structurism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, p.27.

CHAPTER 4
MY TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS
OF VOLUME.1 OF *WU ZI*

Chapter 1

1

Although there may be a hundred, or even more, ways to start this novel, I'd like to use the beginning of that book that half a century ago -- that early autumn morning of 1948, when passing by that old, approximately six-armspan-thick Chinese scholar tree -- Wu Wei determined to write for Ye Lianzi -

"On a hazy morning, that woman sat in front of the window, looking at the road ... "

The beginning consisted of merely this one sentence, with no other words following.

This single sentence was left that way for more than half a century...

2

She has prepared for this novel for almost her entire life, but just at the moment when she was about to start writing, she went mad.

Perhaps there is nothing regrettable. An event is merely meaningful to relevant people, but is there any significance to others, for instance, the audience?

Moreover this is not worthy of surprise, for many people every minute go crazy. In fact, you certainly can't tell whether the people around you, even those very close to you, are mentally stable or not.

But Wu Wei's madness remained a topic of discussion for quite a long time.

Certainly, this is not only because she is a celebrity, but also from youth to old age, neither her words nor her deeds, conformed to the social norms. In her time, among her generation, what she said and did were even regarded as immoral. Even her casual acquaintances can enumerate her various aberrations, -- although modern people would not regard them as worthy of notice.

Her insanity would really be best as a topic in a society beset by economic recession, which can only be stimulated by the unceasing creation of sensationalism. Thanks to her insanity, the jaded society around her did not look so bleak, for a while at least. However, there were no external traces of her madness.

On the contrary, some of her friends said her life lacked no spice at all--

Not too long ago, she was even in charge of arranging an eightieth birthday party for an ignored elder whose house had hosted few visitors.

She had just come back from a trip to Tibet and brought all her friends very thoughtfully selected and unusual gifts, which brought them all joy and surprise;

She also bought herself a suit of fashionable Italian-made clothes which was said to be quite expensive;

She also hosted several dinner parties. Occasionally she would herself cook a couple of extraordinarily delicious dishes, which stood out within the record of her erratic culinary skills;

Also some people said that they had seen her in a grand anniversary celebration, looking elegant and chic.

How could a would-be crazy person like Wu Wei still take such great pleasure in the nondescript daily events of life? To others, there was certainly no reason for her going

crazy – since the more unfortunate Ye Lianzi did not go crazy, does Wu Wei's madness make any sense? Although on the very morning when she went crazy, a reporter phoned her, starting with, "They say you have an illegitimate child, is that true?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about." She said, and hung up. She never expected that after more than thirty years, there were still some people, especially a man, who would use this matter, which has tormented her all her life, to humiliate her. But she was no longer what she was thirty-odd years ago. At that time she did not feel the same way as the female protagonist in the American novel *The Scarlet Letter* did, who, with a capitalized scarlet letter "A" branded on her naked breast, became the target of public attack and felt shamed to death. If only that kind of humiliation could relieve her! But what is worse is that her pain can neither be weakened nor destroyed by such humiliation.

For many years, she has been anticipating this kind of shame, which, she thought, may redeem her sin. According to the homeopathic theory of using poison as an antidote to poison, one day she will be released upon the completion of her sentence. This kind of phone call is nothing! She has endured even more brutal humiliation for decades, but her soul has never felt relaxed -- not at all. On the contrary, this kind of humiliation is now penetrating towards even deeper places in her.

One day, she suddenly saw the light. She will not harbor those useless wild wishes anymore. Plucking up all her courage, she made up her mind to tidy up her myriad sufferings, and set them clearly and delicately aside in a neat place, for this shame can only perish along with her.

Whenever she thought of all this, an expanse of gloomy chaos would flow in front of her eyes. Then an endlessly long, unpenetrably thick stone wall, so near yet so far, would appear. Gradually a beam of faint light would shoot onto the surface of the wall.

That glimmer shared exactly the same hue as that wisp of fight light she saw several days after Ye Lianzi passed away. On that biting winter day, she strolled in the Tiantan Park just at the moment before daybreak. She lingered on the trails stored with hundreds of years of countless footsteps of remarkable people. According to the words of a pseudo eminent past master, who they say can open your heavenly eyes, an abrupt turning should be made whenever startled. Suddenly she was shaken by a severe cough above her head. Turning, she saw a wisp of shimmering light behind her suddenly flash and then go out. Supposedly, that was a sign of her mother's final love and care for her.

On her way home, the sky remained gloomy. Walking on the still deserted street, she looked upwards towards the obscure canopy of the sky. At that time, only the vault of heaven, dark and obscure, above all living creatures, could enwrap her trauma. Except for the gloomy vault of heaven, everything, at the undispellable distance of several steps, is watching her with cold eyes and stabbing her painfully, though without malice, reminding her of her complete isolation.

All of a sudden, she saw on the vault of heaven a huge word— 恕 ‘forgive’.

The word 恕 ‘forgive’, which she seldom thought of and seldom used, was indeed very hard to find in all her writings.

Different from the word 谅 “excuse”, the word 恕 “forgive” can only be interpreted as another extreme term such as “excuse”, “pardon”, “forgive”, etc., versus “tooth-for-a-tooth” revenge for others’ serious crimes. That was exactly typical of Ye Lianzi’s

language, and the first lesson she learned when she was reduced to misery beginning in childhood -- how to size up the propriety of a harsh world.

Isn't this word a response to Wu Wei's unfilial piety?

At crucial moments, Wu Wei can always see some apt words or images in her gloom. Just as, whenever facing that stone wall, she would see in the dark undecodable inscriptions on the wall that were bound together with her by common interests, sometimes appearing sometimes disappearing. At the very beginning, those inscriptions seemed to have just been engraved. Later through years of carving and polishing by exposure to the weather, they were eroded increasingly deeper into the wall. Perhaps the stone wall grew more and more just like a human body, gradually embedding the inscriptions into its own body without pain or sensation.

This resulted from the unceasing engraving, day and night, of an unfathomable power, seemingly tangible but invisible, impalpable but still very concrete.

Afterwards, she quietly finished her breakfast, which included a piece of cheese, a slice of butter and jelly toast, a cup of coffee, a cup of milk, and a very big pear. Then she went to the kitchen to wash her dishes. She washed them so carefully that she even spent a long time brushing the crevices between the fork tines with a wash cloth, as if she were working a two-handed saw.

At the end of the twentieth century, except for the British royal chef, or the very rare upscale hotels that still stick to old fashioned ways, or some stubborn aristocratic family, how many people are still willing to scrub the spaces between the fork tines while washing dishes?

Perhaps because she is a writer, she has an unusual interest in details.

Initially, judging from all aspects, Hu Bingchen and Wu Wei, like two extremes, had no possibility at all of bumping into each other. However, just from Hu's imposing erect posture, Wu Wei imagined that someday a spectacular drama will surely take place between them.

But Hu Bingchen's perspective was totally different. He knew nothing of Wu Wei -- but what he first knew was her tongue.

In fact, at such a distance, through the expanse of heavy snow, it was impossible for him to see Wu Wei's tongue. But in the days to come, he tenaciously insisted that he saw it. In that boundless heavy snow several dozens of years ago, Hu Bingchen walked on the deserted trail to the May Seventh Cadre School.⁴⁵ He was enjoying the leisurely moment of solitude when he bumped headon into a woman standing in the wilderness.

Like most experienced people, he was well accustomed to playing a role in public.

But even he could not really understand that, in people of his background, external aspects are infinitely changeable, but those details which are of the most essential significance and tenacity are to die hard. Even if some changes actually took place, they were merely expedient measures for something else. Put another way, it is a kind of self-conscious or unconscious concealment of one's true intentions. Once the environment has changed, the return to one's old self will unavoidable. Due to his persistence or weakness, sober-mindedness or confusion, either his old self or the role he was playing was deeply rooted in his marrow. Sometimes even he himself had difficulty telling which was his real self.

⁴⁵ Farms established during the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976) in accordance with Mao Zedong's "May Seventh Instruction," where Communist Party, and government cadres, and intellectuals underwent ideological re-education and reformation through labor.

Just take his tacit understanding of “solitude” for example. At that time, he had just been freed from various accusations inflicted on him during the “Cultural Revolution” (1966-1976).

The biting wind and snow swept him along, lashing at him, making him feel its painful scrubbing both inside and out, as if he had been plunged into a winter bath. Enjoying the cleansing shower, he narrowed his eyes at the recollection of all the former political movements. Thanks to his wisdom, farsightedness, carefulness, and precision, and especially to his luck (Was it merely lucky?), he had never been hurt in any of them except for the “Cultural Revolution”...

Before this, it was not that he had never had a solitary moment to critically scrutinize himself, but he was always in a confused state of mind. However, that day, his train of thought flowed smoothly and unhindered. Perhaps that day, it was snowflakes flying everywhere, not an individual single life, that made the universe bear the same imposing presence as when the Earth was first separated from Heaven. Facing the vastness of the world taking shape, one unavoidably has the impulse to dive into his heart for a detailed recounting of bygones from the very beginning.

You underrate him by merely thinking that he was taking pity on himself. To people like him who have seen the world since childhood, this misfortune was nothing at all.

Out of fondness for history, he could not help reviewing his experiences of several decades on a grand scale.

He did not realize that this review had become the main melody of a musical composition which appeared, and would reappear, in every movement of his life. And every performance, like the heavy strikes on the door to destiny in Beethoven’s “Fate

Symphony”, made repetitious the doubts and uncertainties of a century. So this review naturally started and ended up with doubts and uncertainties, which were still raveled and entangled, and thus remained unresolved. A gust of strong wind swirled about the ground. In the whirlpool of the strong snowstorm, his feelings of floating and falling helplessly increased.

Hu Bingchen, harboring high ambitions since childhood, and preeminent in every endeavor, could not help heaving a deep sigh as the raging snowstorm swept him along. Perhaps because of his random thinking -- perhaps because of that snow -- he suddenly thought of those winter plums at his ancestral house and their extremely delicate fragrance tinged with earthy green of the winter scents.

That ancestral dwelling had long ago faded away, disappeared into space, as if it had never existed. However at that very moment, for no reason, he felt he had not grown up in that dwelling in vain. It seemed that his achievements, his lot, were not unrelated to that old dwelling. Otherwise, at that time, he surely wouldn’t have been in a mood that stimulated his interest in that woman he bumped into.

The fluttering heavy snow blurred her silhouette, as well as the old trees and hills behind her, and the mountains, bushes and fields behind the hills. He only noticed that she was sparing no effort to stretch her body upward, stick out her tongue, and concentrate all her attention on catching the snowflakes that cannot be caught at all. However, he failed to notice that the woman, so leisurely and carefree, had slipped into “a-boat-floating-alone-on-a-lonely-stream” state in the snowy wildness, when all the May Seventh Cadre School soldiers stole a day off during the heavy snow, warming themselves by the stove.

He turned immediately onto another trail and climbed up a small hill. Quite sure that nobody noticed him, he gazed at the scene for a while. Wagging its head, a dog was running over the ridge of the field. He saw her bend over, gather a handful of snow, squeeze it into a snowball, and throw it at the dog. She missed and the dog barked jubilantly.

It seemed that she had not meant to hit it. She wanted to squeeze a snowball just because of the snow, the dog, and the isolation.

Impulsively, he wanted to throw a snowball at her – surely he could hit her. Immediately he shook his head, thinking himself really ridiculous. Then he left with a hint of smile, that even he did not perceive and understand, on the corners of his mouth. Immediately he forgot the snowy day, as well as the unique woman in the snow who unexpectedly rushed into his view.

However, he underestimated the experience of that snowy day.

Only in the subsequent predestined encounters with Wu Wei did the scenes of this snow day rise again. He used it frequently as evidence of his solid love for her, which he claimed started from that moment and lasted for a long time, rather than starting from the later change in Wu Wei's status. Such situations happen now and then. If one tosses and turns a non-existent matter over in his mind again and again, he will eventually find the origin, of which even he will also be deeply convinced.

And this foreshadowed what happened later. At least it indicated that his impression of her started from that moment.

Likewise, the detail of Wu Wei scrubbing the fork tines was well worth pondering.

4

The telephone rang again as she was scrubbing the filth, actually there was none at all, between the fork tines. She thought it might be that reporter again, so she prepared herself to answer the call. But it was not the reporter, just one of Hu Bingchen's acquaintances whom she had not seen for a long time. He first talked about the weather, the stock market, and his children's prospects... Suddenly he startled her – unexpectedly but not accidentally: "There is something I'm not sure whether or not I should ask, but anyway I don't believe it...They say that you kicked Hu Bingchen out and married a more wealthy and influential man." At first, she thought it a misunderstanding: "Had people just misheard and mistook Hu Bingchen's remarriage for mine?" She then remembered that it was not the first time she heard this kind of manipulative rumor. There was even another version that she had stayed abroad for a long time, married a foreigner; and completely abandoned Hu Bingchen, refusing to write letters to him. Therefore he had no way of knowing her whereabouts.

Was the letter, in which he made multiple requests for divorce, even begged, claiming that his whole family, young and old, would greatly appreciate her benevolence, sent to another planet instead of to her hand? It was a good thing she gave all the letters to her attorney, but was it necessary to let the attorney distribute photocopies to all their acquaintances and make these letters known to the world?

But wasn't she trying to avoid Hu Bingchen who deliberately concocted pretexts for their divorce? Even a misplaced teacup could be an excuse for him to make a scene. She had to follow the example of Tolstoy, who fled and could not return home.

If a spouse is already determined to divorce, then such details as a misplaced teacup are too numerous to itemize -- quite beyond people like Wu Wei, who is only clever in trivial things but devoid of great talent and bold vision. Except for escape -- as the saying goes, "Of the thirty six strategies, the best is running away" -- what other shield can be used for defense?

Of course it was logical for Hu Bingchen to request a divorce, but in any event it is not others' business!

Had she married a man more wealthy and powerful than Hu Bingchen, or even a "foreigner"?

It's a pity that she is too old, otherwise who knows that they would not say she's a streetwalker!

After Hu Bingchen divorced her, God knows who deliberately whipped up these rumors, which spread like wildfire.

This is the state of her relationship of nearly thirty years with Hu Bingchen, even after their divorce, in which she had to confront all kinds of affronts -- she'd always been ambushed from all sides.

Chapter 2

1

So it was Bai Fan?

After Bai Fan turned out to be the third party between her and Hu Bingchen, Wu Wei knew clearly that Hu Bingchen had divorced her merely to remarry Bai Fan. But Wu Wei did not repay Bai Fan in her own coin, as Bai Fan had done to her, such as fabricating social scandals and launching repeated all-out encircling attacks. The world is so changeable. Now the situation is to her advantage. She did not pin down Hu Bingchen though. In age, she has an overwhelming advantage over both Bai Fan and Hu Bingchen.

No, she did not. Instead, she submissively surrendered Hu Bingchen to Bai Fan.

And far more than this!

Even now, Wu Wei still kept the magnificent three-page accusation written in small regular script, that Hu Bingchen submitted to a certain leading comrade on the Party Central Committee during the process of his divorcing Bai Fan. In the accusation, that recounted in detail Bai Fan's various historical and moral stains, Bai Fan's image was not only no more chaste and pure than Wu Wei's, but probably worse.

Conscientiously serving the Party all his life, Hu Bingchen knew very clearly that his accusation was no love letter making light of a woman. He might lie indiscriminately to women, but he would never lie to a Central Committee leader, to the Law. Therefore, even a dot as tiny as a fly-speck, every stroke of that regular script was as sharp as a dagger.

If Hu Bingchen had really hurt Bai Fan then, compared to his accusations against her, those hurts were really nothing but a drop in the bucket. In their long years of cohabitation, all that Bai Fan (repeatedly emphasized that in those love letters that Hu Bingchen wrote to Wu Wei, that she still kept till today, he said again and again “Bai Fan is a hooligan, so is her entire family!”) had done to Hu Bingchen was even-handedly spelled out in this accusation.

With the lapse of time and changes in modes of thinking, everything enumerated in the accusation no longer mattered. However, one-track minded Bai Fan still felt a lot of pain from their sting. She has no prospects at all right now and is already retired from her post, but she still believes that the opinion of a certain Central Committee member can still play a pivotal role in her fate, or at least negatively affect her obituary, she who fell short of success for lack of the one final effort. She will not behave like Wu Wei, who can adopt a shameless and cynical attitude toward the sacredness of the final verdict pronounced after one’s death.

Moreover, Bai Fan, even now, still doesn’t forget to stab Wu Wei now and then, evoking the illegitimate child and such terms as "worn-out shoe" and "whore" to prove her own chastity. To her, Hu Bingchen’s accusation would not only deprive her of her most lethal weapons, but also mercilessly remove the mask that she’s been wearing, a mask which enables her to play the role of a rigorously chaste woman in public, especially in the presence of Wu Wei.

Even so, Wu Wei did not show anyone her copies of the materials that Hu Bingchen wrote to some Central Committee leader denouncing in detail Bai Fan’s various historical

and moral stains, let alone distribute them widely, as Bai Fan had done to her in those years,

From the experience of her own twenty-odd years of love for Hu Bingchen, Wu Wei knew that her love for him was exactly as painful as Bai Fan's love for him.

Were it not like this, she would also do something tit-for-tat to Bai Fan, just as Bai Fan had done to her.

She cannot help guessing: Perhaps there was good reason for Bai Fan's years of tormenting Hu Bingchen, such as slapping his face, burning him with lit cigarette butts, splashing boiling tea-water in his face, etc. If Wu Wei went further and mentioned Hu Bingchen's pillow talk about his schemes to persuade Bai Fan to agree to divorce, it is most likely that Bai Fan would slap his face again.

Now Wu Wei can do nothing but force a sad, but magnanimous, smile at Hu Bingchen's calculating, fine-sounding words, but she won't take them seriously any more. It's perhaps not exaggerating to say that she now has a "crystal-clear" understanding of Hu Bingchen.

Hu Bingchen is not necessarily a person who likes to lie, but he is quite good at moving people's, emotions, especially women's. Even now, when recalling his honeyed words, Wu Wei's ears still tingle and her heart still beats fast. Buddhist doctrine says the inability to be free from the Six Roots of Sensation⁴⁶ is man's fatal weakness, which he knows quite well. But aren't women too willing to cast themselves into the trap? – not just Wu Wei or Bai Fan. Who else is to blame!

⁴⁶ Buddhist term, referring to eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

But when trying to move people emotionally, Hu Bingchen cannot avoid being incapable of satisfying both sides of his dilemma: “How is it possible not to wet your own shoes if you often walk beside the river?” When his shoes go wet, Hu Bingchen might also lose his one hundred percent certainty. He might inadvertently say or do something. It’s unfair to say that Hu Bingchen said and did things completely out of design. We actually could not foresee this in Hu Bingchen’s adolescent life. At that time, he would disdain to shortchange or swindle someone with some kind of sleight-of-hand.

Perhaps due to the perilous situation of his many subsequent years of underground work, he was compelled to change and adjust his actions to varying conditions, alternating between his real and false selves. Under those circumstances, impetuous action could lead to flaws, which would adversely affect something important. In situations of either insufficient revolutionary achievement or the outcome is hard to predict, or in the sweet moments when it was inappropriate to ruin or reinforce the bonds of mutual love, or due to poverty a promise cannot be fulfilled, manipulating people emotionally is no doubt a simple and practical way to make something out of nothing and lead to success. Not only will no loose ends be left behind, but there is also some flexibility with the details, even if someday you need to face your promise.

So does this apply to those “long gone” women who are still unwilling to let him go? There is still something he can use to manipulate them. From what Hu Bingchen said, his entire family would appreciate Wu Wei’s great benevolence in letting him go. Thanks to her magnanimity, she never anticipated that he would be true to his word. Never. Shouldn’t Bai Fan just say “Thanks” to her?

It is surprising how, in his not-so-long life, Hu Bingchen could always move, with skill and ease, between these two women, who, in his own words, committed adultery and had illegitimate children, marrying and remarrying successively?

Wu Wei did not haggle over Hu Bingchen's capriciousness -- she could not but understand the man's hard choice controlled by all kinds of forces.

Did that not indicate Hu Bingchen's true love for her?

Does that also not indicate that Hu Bingchen is, after all, a man who's willing to be responsible with women? Were it not, he need only sleep with Wu Wei. Why bother to rake up the past of several decades ago, that Bai Fan committed adultery and had illegitimate children, to justify his divorce from Bai Fan and his marriage with Wu Wei? Why still keep Bai Fan as a concubine during his marriage with Wu Wei? And why bother to dig out the case from several decades ago, that Wu Wei committed adultery and had illegitimate kids, and use that as an excuse for his divorce from Wu Wei -- just the same old pretext? Did he not know this would result in his own downfall?

But astute as Hu Bingchen was, why did he leave a copy of that accusation he wrote to a certain Central Committee leader, as well as those materials that he wrote to all concerned departments, in Wu Wei's hand?

Just as he also left a copy of the letter to Bai Fan, that he co-wrote with her twenty-odd years ago denouncing Wu Wei's loss of socialist morality and interfering in their family, in order to show the cleanness of his own hands.

Looking back at Hu Bingchen's identically repeated ploys after an interval of twenty-odd years, Wu Wei felt extreme pain, as if a knife was piercing her heart, both for this man whom she loved for over twenty years and for herself. But Bai Fan did not seem to

be engaging in the subtle style of *Spring and Autumn Annals*⁴⁷ criticism. Her hatred for and retaliation against Wu Wei was transparent, resolute, undisguised, and unscrupulous. Just as there is a relatively more humane way than shooting to execute criminals who are sentenced to death by means of injecting hyper-toxic chemicals, Bai Fan's ideal was to cut out flesh from Wu Wei's body piece by piece. Though many years had passed, Wu Wei still cannot help trembling with lingering fear when recalling the skin-piercing and bone-breaking strength of Bai Fan's nails and fists;

Such abusive curses as "worn-out shoes" and "whore" still ring in her ears;

Her body still seems to be colored black and blue;

The angry roar of that lioness is still ear-splitting;

The buttocks sitting on her is still unmovable like a huge rock;

That year Bai Fan's six slaps on his ears caused the large area of myocardial infarction on Hu Bingchen who suffered from coronary heart disease. About these six slaps, Bai Fan said, "...My crude behavior resulted from discovering you cheating on me. Your relationship with Wu Wei became so intimate that I felt sad, furious, humiliated, and damaged. In order to prove your cleanness, you threw yourself on your knees before me and swore an oath claiming it was all untrue. With your permission, I gave you six slaps in the face. Honestly speaking, did I really slap you hard? To my surprise you said your ears became almost deaf, which caused your myocardial infarction. How you exaggerate!"

⁴⁷ Refers to the use of subtle and guarded language in criticism.

She continued, "... Whenever I didn't satisfy your sexual desire, you became angry saying, 'Although you don't care about me, other women cannot get anything from me.' Later you said you would find a widow as a substitute to solve your problem. I thought you were just joking and agree jokingly. Who would have thought that what was said in fun was really fulfilled, giving Wu Wei an opening. And now you are under her control. This writer, a bewitching Siren,⁴⁸ is really an extreme egotist. You and Wu Wei long ago came up with two plans to divorce me before you were ill, but you kept me in the dark about it all. Though Wu Wei let me know about this by phone two months ago, do I still not have the right to ask you for the truth? Excuse me, I'll file charges in court about Wu Wei's ruining my marriage and family. I have plenty of facts and witnesses who will stand on my side. You'll lose all your social standing and reputation in the wave of this lawsuit. You will feel worse, and then collapse completely, became sick, and finally die." In that case, do Bai Fan's six slaps to Hu Bingchen's face not deserve our sympathy and understanding?

Bai Fan was indeed as good as her word. In no time, she recruited a contingent of witnesses. She even allied herself with Hu Bingchen's enemies, who were either his political opponents or those in complicated conflicts with him.

But Hu Bingchen told Wu Wei a completely different story, from which Wu Wei wouldn't hesitate to go through any possible trial for him. So Wu Wei gave Bai Fan a call, "Should anything untoward happen to Hu Bingchen, I'll definitely tell the public the reason he was persecuted to death!"

⁴⁸ The text uses the name Daji 妲己, the beautiful, favorite concubine of King Zhou 纣王, the last ruler of Shang 商 dynasty (ca. 1600 BC - ca. 1046 BC) .

As the third party, Wu Wei unexpectedly dared defy public opinion with that phone call to Bai Fan, shamelessly but assuredly. Wasn't she going too far! Would she not arouse public indignation, deserves Bai Fan's counter-attack, and become the pariah of the world?

It's true that Hu Bingchen almost lost his life from the six slaps on his ear. When it was hard to tell whether he would live or not, he wrote a letter to Wu Wei asking her to see him in the hospital, one way or another.

He thought he still did this as carefully and unobtrusively as he did underground work in those years. He didn't expect that Bai Fan was not only endowed with equally consummate skills, but was also experienced in mobilizing the masses – she won the close cooperation of the housekeeper who immediately dashed downstairs and notified Bai Fan by phone. So in no time Bai Fan rushed to the hospital and played out the highlight of the opera “Beating the Mandarin Ducks”.⁴⁹

Several years later, this housekeeper again came to the new home of Hu Bingchen and Wu Wei.

In her early years, the housekeeper had taken part in the land reform in her hometown and so knew how to use the weapons of the poor and lower-middle peasants -- their bitter suffering and deep class hatred. Her accusation against Bai Fan won Wu Wei's sympathy.

However, don't consider Wu Wei's motive so pure. She retained this housekeeper only to display her own large-mindedness and forgiveness to this hospital informer. Pleased with her scheme, she firmly believed that the housekeeper would eventually feel

⁴⁹ An allusion to the theatrical *Yingwumu Zhenwen ji* 鸚鵡墓貞文記, by Meng Chengshun 孟稱舜 (Ming dynasty). “Beating Mandarin Ducks” often refers to separating an affectionate couple.

the pricks of conscience and figure out that she was different from Bai Fan. She especially wanted to show that, compared to such senior revolutionaries as Bai Fan, she, though not a senior revolutionary, has deeper class feelings for toiling people.

In the new home of Wu Wei and Hu Bingchen, in this environment where Wu Wei showed deeper class feelings than Bai Fan for toiling people, this housekeeper, besides slapping together their two meals, changed one of their rooms into a very profitable tailoring shop. But when Wu Wei proposed an extra cleaning duty to her daily routine, she immediately quit the job. At that time, the housekeeper already had a lover, a man with a small room for her tailoring. More about this later.

Worse luck was that on the previous day Bai Fan dug out Hu Bingchen's eyes with all of her ten fingernails.

Whenever Bai Fan entered his ward, Hu Bingchen would close his eyes and not give her a glance. According to the doctors, his electrocardiogram would undulate violently upon her arrival. Since his heart could not tolerate such a burden, the doctors finally suggested that, considering the entire situation, she not visit him in the hospital.

This was truly dropping stones on one who's already fallen into a well. Was she not Madame Hu, the legal wife of Vice-minister Hu Bingchen!

Hu Bingchen just ignored whatever she said.

Before his myocardial infarction, Bai Fan had crawled into his bed in order to improve their relationship. But as soon as she entered his bed, Hu Bingchen immediately packed up his bedding and went to sleep in the study. Whenever that happened, she uncontrollably yelled at his back, "I know you refuse to ...to me just because you want to ...to Wu Wei."

The more she lost her self control, the more she encountered Hu Bingchen's cold contempt, and the less Hu Bingchen showed respect for her, to say nothing of care and love.

When not flirting with women, Hu Bingchen was reserved to the extent that his indifference towards them was intimidating. Even when he flirted, women never presumed upon his advances to lose their awe and veneration for him. There is a kind of man who forever overawes women. Hu Bingchen was lucky to be one among the very few.

It is not that Bai Fan disrespected Hu Bingchen, but that she was just driven out of her senses by him.

That day, as soon as she entered the ward, Hu Bingchen immediately shut his eyes, which had been opened widely. Still, she saw his eyes fixed on the ceiling, but had no idea what they were thinking. For one whose death is expected at any moment, that pair of eyes was just too bright.

If for her, already poised to enter the ward, Hu Bingchen's closed eyes were merely a door closed in her face, then there was, after all, still some possibility of opening it. However, shining without contact and sparkling craftily only showed their determined rejection of her access.

A flame of sinister anger scurried hither and thither within her body. Wherever it reached, a puff of smoke rose but was unable to burst into flame.

Hu Bingchen's cold face left her utterly helpless for a while. Suddenly a stratagem came to her: "Here comes Wu Wei," she said spookily.

Hu Bingchen opened his eyes abruptly and took a quick look toward the door. In his suddenly opened eyes, she read, in a flash, what she had not seen for the past decades.

The doorway was merely an empty frame.

Hu Bingchen immediately closed his eyes again and said nothing for a while, just concentrating on his irregular breathing. He was more than unexpectedly made fun of -- his dignity had been violated.

Still, Hu Bingchen was restrained. He had pulled in his horns to such an excessive, almost morbid, degree that he seemed to feign concealing something. But he was definitely not like this when he was a teenager.

In the nineteen thirties, a national crisis was imminent. Everyone shared responsibility for the destiny of the country, so a military training course was mandatory in middle schools. Whenever on training marches, Hu Bingchen always extended his right hand when lifting his right leg and extended his left hand when lifting his left (Hu Bingchen was not unique in this but had a counterpart: Twenty-odd years later, Wu Wei did exactly the same when she learned to goose step in her physical education class just as Hu Bingchen did in his military training course), but he soon tired of the military training course.

The military training instructor was an old geezer from the warlord era who often pulled out a big lidded watch to check the time. Once while in formation, Hu Bingchen shouted, “Teacher, was your watch made back in the Zhou dynasty?”

Consequently, he failed the military training course.

Did the big pocket watch have something to do with his right leg always moving with his right hand or his left leg with his left hand? Did it offend him or obstruct him in anyway?

In the college preparatory school, the English teacher was a rascally Englishman. During summer vacation, he ran a coffee shop in Beidaihe with his daughter, which in itself was looked down upon by Hu Bingchen, a descendant of an aristocratic family. In English class, he would read other books hidden under the desk, which the teacher had probably often noticed. One day, the teacher called on him, “Why did you not listen to my lecture?” He said, “I already know everything you talked about. What’s more, you frequently make grammatical mistakes.”

There were about one hundred students in this large English class – so the teacher always under the gaze of all those watchful eyes. As those gazes fell row by row towards the center of the lecture hall, imagine the added pressure on the teacher! What could the teacher do – he gave himself two loud slaps in the face, and that was that.

Hu Bingchen thought to himself, “Go ahead if you like.” Then he said down calmly.

Subsequently, the school hired an American to teach English. From all this, it’s clear that Hu Bingchen not only did not restrain himself, he was almost insolent and mean.

This cutting edge was gradually put into his scabbard when he came to Yan’an. At first, he was assigned to study at Northern Shaanxi College,⁵⁰ where President Cheng Fangwu’s first sentence at their first meeting was, “You are a Cantonese.”

Said with a positive tone, so he could dismiss this tiny error with a smile. However, he corrected the President immediately, “No, I am not.”

⁵⁰ Predecessor of the People’s University of China; established at Yan’an in September 1937, by the Communist Party of China.

President Cheng smiled, pointed towards the classroom in the cave dwelling on the slope, and sent him off to class.

But such confrontations gradually decreased.

Stubborn and unruly, Hu Bingchen never expected that all of a sudden he would become a person who was willing to accept correction involuntarily.

When his revolutionary record, accumulated page by page, became encyclopedic, and thinking back on his involuntary transformation, he actually drew the conclusion that this change had benefited him a great deal. The lessons he received were not many, only happening a couple of times, but they produced a marked effect. His first lesson came from his visit to an admirable and knowledgeable friend who had once studied in Germany. Like Yang Yanhui in the Beijing opera “Fourth Son Visits His Mother”,⁵¹ this friend had been arrested by the Central Bureau⁵² when he did underground work in Shanghai, but was released from prison after using a pseudonym and making a sham confession.

Certainly he could have waited for the Party’s rescue, or spread word among the agents planted in the prison and patiently await instructions from the Party, as in novels or movies. However, the party didn’t know he had been arrested, and he also had no idea who the agents in the prison were...

“Fourth Son Visits His Mother” is a classic opera which had been popular from the reign of the Xianfeng Emperor (r.1850-1861) of the Qing dynasty right up to the present,

⁵¹ The story of the fourth son, Yang Yanhui, of General Yang’s family in the Song 宋dynasty (960-1279) .

⁵² The Chinese KMT national spy organization, short for the Executive Committee of the Chinese KMT Central Bureau of Investigation, formally established in August 1938.

except when banned during the period between the late nineteen fifties and the “Cultural Revolution” (1966-1976).

Of course, this friend was criticized in Yan’an. Also, due to his too forthright disposition he had offended quite a few people and had never been the darling of fortune. But drama is drama, which is not life. And it’s not the last word. You certainly should call on a friend who is in difficult circumstances, it is an age-old rule. He didn’t know at that time that you must cut all ties with such a person; better yet to hit him, even if your own parent, when he is down. This visit resulted in Hu Bingchen’s being subjected to self-criticism for quite a long period of time. Since then the old rule has become a worn-out maxim that means nothing.

He had started by making fun of an old melody by singing, “On the banks of the Yellow River, some unlucky sons of the Chinese nation froze to death...slackness and slovenliness are our living style...”, which was reported.

The original song goes, “On the banks of the Yellow River, are mustered a collection of outstanding descendants of the Chinese nation...united, alert, earnest and lively is our way of life...”⁵³ However, what Hu Bingchen substituted into the tune were not only far from the original words, they simply ran counter to them.

What does his parody mean? It’s reactionary! Unconvinced, Hu Bingchen made a thorough examination of all the publications in Yan’an, a lot of which he thought were merely old wine in new bottles. Why was he not allowed to make fun of the song?

He was surprised that such a big fuss could be made over such a trifle. Then he saw the light. “Submitting a report,” this was really a very important subject that needed

⁵³ Campus song at the Chinese People’s Anti-Japanese Military and Political University which was established on Jan. 20, 1937.

study. But he also never regretted not getting advice from someone of great sagacity. For you cannot count on others to teach you how to deal with thing which can only be self-taught.

Likewise, “submitting a report” was what Gu Qiushui and General Bao Tianjian first encountered, and could least endure, when they arrived in Yan’an. “Even a cough could be reported” Gu Qiushui said. Who can say their later return from Yan’an back to the dazzling mundane world, had nothing to do with this?

Later, Hu Bingchen, putting it all together, realized that getting into a severe fix can start with some trivial things. When you think something is no big deal, bullets are probably waiting for you. In 1943, this friend naturally could not escape the “salvation” of the so-called “Rescue Campaign”.⁵⁴

Several years later, Hu Bingchen got the news:

In 1947, when Hu Zongnan (1896-1962) mounted a large-scale attack on Yan’an, the Central Committee decided upon a strategic retreat. At Yongping Town, this friend, together with several criminals, who were “saved” in the “Rescue Campaign” and whose cases failed to be dealt with for as long as four years, and even several Westerners whose purposes in Yan’an were unknown, were shot to death. Their bodies were disposed of just as the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) treated the body of the Guangxu (r.1875-1908) Emperor’s favorite concubine -- Zhen, dropped into a well. Had Hu Zongnan’s troops not advanced all the way to Yongping Town, retrieved the bodies from the well, and whipped up rumors about this, they would have disappeared without a single trace, just like foam on the sea. However, they were not as lucky as Concubine Zhen, whose fate later became

⁵⁴ Originally refers to the Cadre-Examination Campaign, during the Yan’an Rectification Campaign, starting 1942, which turned out to be the notorious “Delinquent Rescue Campaign” headed by Kang Sheng 康生 (1898—1975).

an inexhaustible source of material for movies and soap operas -- a kind of rehabilitation. Had Hu Zongnan not mounted a large-scale attack on Yan'an, had the Central Committee not made a strategic retreat from Yan'an, had there been more time to investigate them..., perhaps they would not have ended up like this.

At that time there were no more than thirty thousand local cadres in Yan'an, including only a very few of the less than twenty thousand non-local cadres who had narrowly escaped the 1942 "Rescue Campaign" of the Yan'an Rectification Movement. The cave dwellings used by the Security Department to lock up criminals were overcrowded. These approximately ten-square-meter cells could not even fit eight men. Compared to this, the one thousand people who died in Yongping Town were more in line with Mao Zedong's dictum: "Not even one killed, the majority never even arrested."

So the fault still rests with Hu Zongnan. Now when Hu Bingchen received the anonymous note on a piece of palm-sized torn hemp, which had traveled from hand to hand, he no longer responded to the rambling words in his bookish way.

"How did you arrive at Yan'an? Explain in detail, in detail."

"First by train, then switched to bus."

"Wow! We revolutionaries have not seen a train for many years. But you rode both a train and a bus! Tell us, what kind of people can go by train and bus?" "Anyone, as long as he has a ticket."

"You are quibbling! Since the Nationalist Party (KMT) treated you so well that you rode by train and bus, are you not a spy?"

Not only was he no longer bookish, he also told a very close junior underground worker, "Although I know you very well, if our organization says you're a spy, I'll shoot

you without any hesitation.” He considered himself lucky that he had already left Yan’an when the “Rescue Campaign” began. Otherwise, he surely would not have escaped doom solely because of his intellectual identity, not to mention by bus and train.

Who could’ve expected that the idea “All other trades are minor, scholarship excels them all”⁵⁵ had entrapped a generation of intellectuals! He rapped the table hesitantly, pondering, “I’m afraid it will be very hard for intellectuals from now on.” Later, whenever a “campaign” happened, he could not help thinking that probably his friend’s spirit in heaven appreciated that bullet he encountered in Yongping Town.

In addition, during his period of underground work, Hu Bingchen had been infatuated with women to such an extent that he and Bai Fan almost split. Before 1949, four conflicts between Hu Bingchen and Bai Fan almost resulted in their breaking-up, but those were not as severe as this one. Besides marking a change in political power, the year 1949 was the boundary for many other things.

Except for the phrase “going different ways”, there is probably not a better term to describe their split at that time; since they had never gone through a marriage procedure, there is no sense in using the legal term “divorce”. Revolutionaries at that time were quite old fashioned. Those who cohabitated, or had a long-term relationship, or occasionally had a transient episode outside their long-term relationship, could only dot the color of the monochrome world, or almost count as breaking revolutionary conventions! Procedures, and such, were nothing but formalism.

Although very traditional, Bai Fan took her cohabitation with Hu Bingchen very seriously. So for a long time, her conscience had been plaguing her over her affair with Liu Tong. Her colleagues, more than once, found letters from Bai Fan to Hu Bingchen on

⁵⁵ From Act II of the play “Jinfeng Chai” 金凤钗, by Zheng Tingyu 郑廷玉 (Yuan 元 dynasty).

the floor, tables, and beds in their work place. These letters, all similar in content, were filled with plaintive, begging for mercy, “Can you not forgive my unintentional mistakes?”

Hu Bingchen was quite different from Bai Fan. He had neither mentioned Bai Fan’s repeated unintentional mistakes to others, nor had he said why he could not forgive those mistakes. He just wanted to break off from her.

But why did he leave Bai Fan’s personal letters here and there? Surely Bai Fan’s letters held many awkward secrets that could only be revealed to him, and that only needed his forgiveness. One cannot help doubting his magnanimity.

Had the work of the organization not interfered with them, had they not been limited by the secret nature of the underground service, had they not been Communist Party members dedicated to the Proletarian revolutionary cause, they would have gone separate ways long ago.

The flaw in his infatuation for women was revealed in a very small detail. Just as she had studied and decoded the ciphers from the KMT transmitters, a skill in which she was endowed with extraordinary talent, Bai Fan began to decode Hu Bingchen’s abrupt addiction to social dancing. Sure enough, she found clues that brought a decisive turn for the better, and alleviated a bit of her self-condemnation.

No wonder, nearly twenty years later, even on a desolate snowy day, Hu Bingchen immediately turned onto a trail, climbed a hill, and, with the certainty that nobody noticed him, enjoy the charming picture of a woman, leisurely and carefree, in the snowstorm just like a boat floating unhurriedly alone on a deserted river.

Although Hu Bingchen emphasized repeatedly to Wu Wei that he could not dance, and showed obvious aversion when he mentioned dancing, still in dancing with Hu Bingchen, Wu Wei realized that he danced exactly as shown in 1930s movies. That kind of ear-to-ear and temple-to-temple dancing style, characterized by ulterior motives, became almost extinct in mainland China after 1949, until revived when people such as *dakuan* (Mr. Fat Cat) entered the historic arena.

In dancing with Hu Bingchen, she also heard a remote echo. The memory of a woman, who was certainly not Bai Fan, must surely have plunged into the deep pond of his past.

That dancing Hu Bingchen probably had many stories.

Wu Wei was not impressed by his pretence.

Thirdly, in the latter half of the year 1945, when the Anti-Japanese War had just ended, the KMT and the Communist Party (CCP) were still in the second period of “cooperation” overflowing with hypocritical friendship.

On the one hand, Chiang Kai-Shek wanted to reduce troop forces. The Eight-Year Anti-Japanese War had resulted in severe losses, inflation, and stroked poverty among the masses. Using its inability to continuously finance provisions for four million troops as a pretext, the KMT demanded that the CCP simultaneously reduce its armaments -- ostensibly to stabilize national finance -- to weaken CCP. On the other hand, Chiang Kai-Shek really didn't want to hold peace negotiations with the CCP. He figured that after Japan surrendered all troops and equipment used in the Anti-Japanese War could be aimed at encircling and suppressing the CCP. Therefore, he spared no effort to sabotage KMT-CCP cooperation and fabricate pretexts in order to eliminate the CCP.

However, the CCP army had less than one million soldiers. Because of such a great disparity in forces, the CCP troops urgently needed time to accumulate strength. Having neither ability nor intention to fight, the CCP proposed to start a “new period of peace and democracy” and establish a coalition government -- in order to infiltrate the KMT. The CCP was playing the card of “peaceful evolution,” and its decision to fight came later.

Before Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-Shek began disarmament negotiations, the Central Committee hoped the entire CCP could reach a unified understanding on this issue.

Our revered Lin Boqu convened a discussion in Zhou’s Mansion, soliciting opinions from the general public, Hu Bingchen undoubtedly included.

The realization of any aspiration needs the right opportunity, without which great aspirations lead to nothing but sorrowful white hair.

Opportunities seemed to favor Hu Bingchen.

At that time there were at least forty KMT spies around Zhou’s Mansion. Along the riverbank, where even buses could not access, and waiters in the small alley restaurant were spies specifically to monitor the activities at Zhou’s Mansion.

But they had never caught Hu Bingchen, who was, of course, not easy to catch because it was a period of KMT-CCP cooperation. They could only continue shadowing him, collecting more clues and being ready to tighten the net when necessary.

Hu Bingchen was resourceful enough to throw off all their tails. He rented a small courtyard opposite Zhou’s Mansion. Whenever exiting Zhou’s Mansion, he directly entered the opposite yard, crossed it, exited the back door, and went along the mountain

behind the yard. Such a strategy was not rare but rather mundane. However, from start to finish, the spies never realized that he was an extremely experienced intelligence agent of some significance.

Because he lived outside Zhou's Mansion, it was not easy for Hu Bingchen to report on his work. When the hour was late, he usually had dinner or slept there. Therefore he not only had many opportunities to eat with the revered Dong Biwu and Lin Biao, but also once ate with Zhou Enlai. One day, our revered Dong invited him over for a drink. They drank a bottle of Maotai till both of them were tipsy – the optimum state of drunkenness. From this time on they drank together, and Hu Bingchen realized that our revered comrade Dong could also feel lonely at times. Loneliness will not die out -- it's very hard to completely discard personal feelings.

During the Chongqing Negotiations (Aug. 29 - Oct. 10, 1945), Mao Zedong at first shared Chiang Kai-shek's Mansion in Geleshan⁵⁶ with Patrick Jay Hurley (1883—1963), and stayed at Zhang Zizhong's Osmanthus Garden⁵⁷ when he went to town on official business. Consequently, people in Zhou's Mansion were very worried that Chiang might possibly pull a fast one like placing him under house arrest or putting poison in his food. Since anything sent to Mao from Zhou's Mansion was inspected by Chiang Kai-Shek's guards, everybody suggested that he move to Zhou's Mansion. Zhou Enlai said, "These suggestions are very good and I'll be in charge of reporting to Mao Zedong." Followed these urgings, Mao moved into the last room on the right side of the second floor in Zhou's Mansion.

⁵⁶ A branch of the Jinyun Mountain in Sichuan四川 province, famous nationwide for the Baigongguan白公馆 and Zhazidong渣滓洞 Prisons during the Anti-Japanese War.

⁵⁷ In Chongqing重庆. Originally General Zhang Zizhong's Mansion. There are two sweet-smelling osmanthus trees in the courtyard, hence the name Osmanthus Garden.

After Mao Zedong moved to Zhou's Mansion, the leading inner-Party figures gathered to cooperate and help each other. But all of a sudden two fires broke out in Zhou's Mansion, where everything had been in peace and harmony. Obviously nothing can subdue the Real Dragon, the ordained Son of Heaven, which Mao Zedong was predestined to be. The first fire burned several thatched cottages in the hostel of the office agency. All the agency staff rushed to fight the fire, except Mao Zedong who said, while strolling idly in the hallway on the second floor, pinching a cigarette, "The new ones won't come if the old are not gone. The thatched huts are on fire at just the right time to build new foreign-style buildings."

The second fire broke out one day around nine or ten in the morning, when remaining cinders reignited after the confidential clerks on the third floor, who burnt the cipher codes, left before the fire in the stove completely died out. As it happened, Hu Bingchen had gone to Zhou's Mansion to begin his duties. So he dived headlong into the raging flames, first dashing into the secure room on the third floor to rescue the most confidential filing cabinet...As a result, his hair and eyebrows were scorched. Good thing there were no scars left on his face. Afterwards, Hu Bingchen thought, while stroking his face in the mirror, "Better if I had a few minor scars left."

He didn't know that Mao Zedong was nearby watching with a cold eye when he dashed in to rescue the confidential document cabinet. Hu Bingchen praised himself as destined to shoulder great responsibility; he wouldn't hesitate to give his life for the cause if necessary, and never harbored any desire to show off. Many years later, people still remembered Hu Bingchen dashing around in the bitter smoke and fire, which, however, made no impression on Mao Zedong, the indifferent onlooker.

Mao Zedong even held in contempt such accomplished rulers as Emperor Taizong (r.627-649) of the Tang Dynasty, Emperor Taizu (r.960-976) of the Song Dynasty, and Genghis Khan, Emperor Taizu (r.1206-1228) of the Yuan Dynasty, for being only good at military administration; Hu Bingchen, who merely defied personal danger, was no one special. But several years later, this same young man almost lost his life in order to locate Mao Zedong's missing son.

But his feat impressed other leaders very much. You can imagine that our revered Lin Boqu solicited Hu Bingchen's opinions as naturally as a channel forms for a stream. In those days Hu Bingchen was elated with the feeling that his long-cherished industry-will-save-the-nation goal would finally be fulfilled. He also fingered that he could take this opportunity to show off his ability on the policy issues formulated by the Central Committee... Everything seemed perfectly safe.

Vehement, he spoke with assurance and composure. He even indulged in exaggeration, "I approve of simultaneously establishing the Southern and Northern Governments. This will enable us to devote major efforts to developing industry in the North. When we are strong enough, we can undoubtedly annihilate the KMT by means of peaceful evolution. The natural downfall of the South will also avoid significant sacrifices in a war for liberating China." "...We can also make use of the KMT's technical personnel. Even though concentrating on expanding its troops, the KMT has also paid attention to industrial construction through establishing the Resources Committee. The majority of its members have studied in the United States, have very high skill levels, and are inclined towards our policies. During the Anti-Japanese War, the KMT established the Department of Economy, which was taken over by the Resources Committee after Japan

surrendered. They also have an arsenal office staffed by people who studied in Germany...If the Resources Committee can get permission to pursue industrial construction, they might do better than we can. For one thing, their experts have countless ties around the world. For another, they can access up-to-date information, maintain technical communication with the West, keep in touch with the United Nations and the Western countries, and supervise one another politically...As long as we do our best, we can definitely beat the KMT.”

Although he had earnestly considered that speech for a long time, and had prepared well for it, when weighing its words afterwards, he considered it quite immature, especially “supervise one another politically”. But an abrupt change took place just as he was talking with such fervor and assurance. In the full-scale Civil War launched by the KMT, the CCP had no choice but to abandon the plan of starting “a New Period of Peace and Democracy” and establishing a coalition government.

Hu Bingchen also inevitably became the target of criticism as an unreliable person. Compared to the machinations of the later “Anti-Rightist Campaign” (1957), this was not much of a “lure-the-snake-out-of-the-hole” ploy. But he will no longer say all he knows, and say it without reserve. That he won’t say all he knows and say it without reserve any more doesn’t mean that he really thought he was wrong. All his life Hu Bingchen had never apologized for anything no matter whether it was a national thing, a major issue, a domestic matter, or a love affair... Even when he suffered a temporary setback and withdrew for a while, he could still square accounts when the opportunity came; he would never let his opponents off, in secret, if not in the open. So he always remembered that small storied wooden building. Was it in some sense not a glory? The two or three

lessons weren't much, but they almost covered all aspects of his attitudes towards life and played a decisive role in Hu Bingchen's fresh start. Looking back at these experiences, he always smiled knowingly – “play your part”, “play your part”, does one not grow out of “acting”!

To play your part is neither easy nor hard. Anyway, his frivolousness was a byproduct of his wisdom and farsightedness.

After this knowing smile, Hu Bingchen gradually began to create a new persona.

Although Hu Bingchen's frequent attempts at self-restraint often went too far, verging on the morbid, and even somewhat affected, at heart he was still conceited and contemptuous.

The combination of his natural and unrestrained pride in his talent, and his shallow haughtiness, inevitably resulted in a lack of calmness and self-control – the single syllable difference between *nei-lian* (内敛 ‘self-control’) and *shou-lian* (收敛 ‘self-restraint’) denotes totally different concepts – just as a bow that is a wee bit too tight can easily break and harm the archer and people next to him.

He was a man who would even disown his relatives and friends, whoever encroached upon his dignity, and remain unrepentant till the end of his days.

During the initial period of the Cultural Revolution, on a night fraught with grim possibilities, one of the chiefs leading the “Great Revolution” summoned Hu Bingchen to the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse. From his performance during the “Great Revolution”, he knew what this “call-in” meant and was accordingly uneasy.

Before the official discussion, the “chief” chitchatted, “What work have you done?”

He replied, “In the Social Department for a long time.”

The “chief” seemed lost in thought for a while but revealed some familiarity when he opened his mouth again. “You must be one of my former subordinate.”

So they really need qualified personnel!

How could the “chief” not know Hu Bingchen’s past? The moment the "Great Revolution" started, he made a detailed investigation of Hu Bingchen, whose files revealed that he accomplished many tough missions through his intelligence and capability, and therefore Zhou Enlai thought very highly of him. So at the beginning of his stormy overbearing reign, the “chief” appointed Hu Bingchen to undertake an important task, never expecting that Hu Bingchen would be so disobedient. He didn’t even feign compliance, and just thwarted all expectations. Ever since the “chief” had been in power at Yan’an, he had never tolerated such intractability!

Hu Bingchen sensed the subtle message in his words. Having served the Party for several decades, he knew that those subtleties could be a prelude to one’s rise or fall, and even life or death. With his command of “acting”, and saying some innocuous but principled words such as “I am just mediocre. Please be kind enough to give me your valuable advice and help,” he knew that things might possibly turn out quite differently.

Moreover, saying this was also appropriate since this “chief” was really a chief in the KGB.

Although feeling agitated, he didn’t reply that way. Instead, he just stood there, straightening his neck, pulling a long and expressionless face, and not even nodding his head. All this was the product of Hu Bingchen’s skeptical, though not explicit, attitude towards this “chief”, an attitude which resulted from hearing the latter’s speech at Yan’an.

Hu Bingchen is very good at nitpicking. From his youth, when he couldn't goose step and thus got fed up with his military training course, to making fun of the military training instructor, we can see his stubbornly biased pettiness. He thought this "chief" spoke in a manner that was neither Western nor Chinese, and was complacently ostentatious as an imitation foreign devil. What need does a revolutionary have for parading around like this? After all, people cannot help doubting the motives of someone who is fond of showing off. The "chief" spoke of Trotsky (1879-1940) whenever making a report. Again and again he claimed that Trotskyism advocated the Japanese occupation of China, which simply made no sense. There were merely twenty-eight and a half Trotskyites in China, was it worth bluffing and blustering like this?

If a person always repeats the same thing, it is most likely his overriding anxiety – or, he knows nothing else.

This sycophant, who was a servile follower of Wang Ming (1904-1974) in his heyday and was stationed in the Soviet Union for a long time, once went out of his way to curry favor to the extent that he even shouted loudly at the Communist International conference "Long live Wang Ming!"

With his own eyes Hu Bingchen had seen the "chief" and Wang Ming strolling along leisurely on trotting horses outside Yan'an, talking and laughing. Their happy laughing and cheerful talking were alternately rising and falling with their horses' springy pace and indeed had an unrestrained charm. It was a Sunday. He had left his station at Yandianzi to buy some daily necessities at Yan'an. Those two riders, in the deserted wildness, on the barren yellow soil, in that Puritan revolutionary environment, with absolute sincerity for the revolutionary cause, were so ostentatious in their implied

betrayal of the revolutionary masses that he could not help repeatedly turning around to resentfully look at them.

But fortune has its twists and turns over a span of thirty years. This person, who whipped his horse side by side with Wang Ming fathomed the situation and then made a quick turnabout. In the twinkling of an eye, he became a reliable Party go-getter, criticizing Wang Ming at the very beginning of the 1942 Rectification Movement.

At that time, Hu Bingchen had already gone to Chongqing far away, and failed to witness this naked drama.

"The Rectification" had evolved into "the Rescue Campaign"⁵⁸ during 1943. Almost all of the nearly twenty thousand cadres who had traveled the long road to Yan'an to join the revolution were detained for interrogation, put under detention, and labeled spies. But the "chief" kept his position as Minister of the Central Social Investigatory Department -- at the expense of his comrades' lives, both political and physical. Some of the revolutionaries reported to higher levels that this treacherous "chief" had ruthlessly framed faithful and upright comrades, but all of them were put off with an excuse: We need to use him to get rid of thorns in our flesh and to dredge up some embarrassing dirt about Wang Ming's past.

Over the "chief's" face Hu Bingchen's eyes quickly swept from under his half-drooping eyelids, trying to get a glance of that pair of eyes hidden behind the glasses, whose true color had not been revealed for a long time. However, he caught nothing but a muddle of fleeting and turbid light with no distinction between black and white.

⁵⁸ "The Rescue Campaign" was also called the "Delinquent-Rescue Campaign" due to a "Leftist" mistake made during the 1943 cadre examination at Yan'an.

At that time, his long gone suspicion revived. How could human beings have a history, be deeply in love in it, and pledge their devotion to its authenticity? He suddenly thought it ridiculous. Isn't this just mistreating and being too hard on oneself?

No wonder that when someone ascends the throne, he tries to eliminate history.

During the twenty-odd year interval, things changed constantly and "movements" occurred repeatedly. In spite of all changes, this "chief" made rapid advances in his career, became overwhelmingly arrogant, and now and then stirred up trouble in the "movements", which made Hu Bingchen consider the the "Great Revolution" all the more absurd.

There's no denying the fact that Hu Bingchen has a good eye for both people and things.

After many years' self-cultivation, Hu Bingchen gradually "acted" with facility, but he knew that not everything could slip by under false pretences. Finally a "No Acting" moment comes when a choice is required.

After thinking carefully, he declined the opportunity at hand. At the time when some men and women in power became more prosperous every day, it quite looked as if he would die a resounding martyr's death.

That refusal was a test not only of his wisdom, courage, boldness and faithfulness, but also of his family line, his broad-mindedness without excessive expectations (If cakes just fall from the sky, that is a different story), his steady and resolute indifference regardless of the honor or humiliation inherited from his family line, that well-established anchor of long standing.

However, his deep humiliation at the way that “chief” sat with a “fox-borrowing-the-tiger’s-fierceness” tone of voice, exerted its influence on Hu Bingchen with no less force than his weighing the political advantages and disadvantages of his decision.

“The fact is that Comrade Qi Benyu has kept us informed about your little-known past history, which needs a checkup...”

It’s all right if Qi Benyu’s name is not mentioned, but whenever it is, Hu Bingchen can not help thinking of his wantonly banging the table at him. Now Hu Bingchen’s thought went even further. He turned livid, totally disregarding this “chief’s” remarks – this man, whose treacherous killing of multiple birds with one stone, still leaving him a tiny bit of room for manoeuvre, was hidden by accident or design.

Qi Benyu is such a louse! How dare he bang the table at me!

The romantic and restless blood of Hu’s family ran wildly and irrepressibly in his veins. The “chief” immediately perceived his incurable disobedience. “So do you acknowledge or not that you have followed the bourgeoisie reactionary line and given many speeches against the Great Cultural Revolution?”

He replied, "I do not know what you mean by the bourgeois reactionary line. All my talks were recorded and can be examined by the Party leaders...If you insist I said something different, I can do nothing about it.

Hu Bingchen heard the “chief” flicking a piece of paper in his hand and sensed a whiff of cold wind whizzing through those fingers.

Soon afterwards, he was informed that he was to be expelled from the Party because he had defied instructions from the “Central Committee”. Such defiance confounds the differences between ourselves and the enemy, and is fundamentally counter-Party,

counter-socialism, and counter-Central Committee as well. “What is your personal opinion about this decision of the Central Committee?” He stood bolt upright in front of the “chief”, “I reserve my opinion concerning this decision of our organization. I neither acknowledge that I am a reactionary, nor do I accept expulsion from the Party.” At that, instead of feeling disturbed, he resolved to figure out how to spend either the endless remainder of his “reactionary career”... or prepare to be beheaded.

Imagine how Bai Fan’s pranks infuriated Hu Bingchen, who had even refused to admit defeat in that earlier round. He said coldly and contemptuously, “Your unreasonableness, stubbornness, tyranny, and ignorance, hereditary and unchangeable, are all inherited from your father. Your mother has lived her entire life in your father’s shadow, do you think I will live in your shadow?”

Bai Fan immediately threw the pickles and soup she brought on the floor. The aluminum lunch-box spun on the smooth floor, as if it had no understanding of the moment, just as an old hand-cranked phonograph grudging produces a hoarse and out-of-tune elegy from its old-fashioned record.

Right then, she yelled and stretched out all ten fingers to dig out Hu Bingchen’s eyes, “Open your eyes and look at me! Open your eyes and look at me! ” Her yelling reverberated through the hallway of the dreary ward, suddenly turning the gloomy medical ward into a dynamic psychiatric floor. The doctors and nurses considered her especially cruel and tyrannical -- no wonder Hu Bingchen’s electrocardiogram undulated irregularly the moment she entered the room.

No matter how hard she tried, Hu Bingchen would not open his eyes.

With her own eyes Bai Fan saw his tightly closed eyelids quickly spread out calmly instead of twitching... she saw Hu Bingchen immediately construct a protective screen that is even harder to penetrate than a bastion of iron. She could only watch helplessly as he implemented the project, but could do nothing about it.

In desperate despair, she screamed, "I'm trying to drive you mad! "

Just as she was about to tumble into the abyss of failure, Wu Wei entered the hospital, flagrantly and shamelessly, for her rendezvous with Hu Bingchen. Isn't she fishing in troubled waters?

Wu Wei, deeply grieved and wailing over Hu Bingchen's bitter experience, and Bai Fan, insane and out of control, formed a striking contrast as if deliberately designed. What were they up to!

If her one-on-one contest with Hu Bingchen had only brought about his harm to her, then the tryst between Wu Wei and Hu Bingchen was not merely a jointly inflicted wound, but also Hu Bingchen's heartless betrayal of her in the presence of her foe. The embarrassment from such a betrayal left her no more room for manoeuvre...Can this kind of hurt be calculated merely by doubling?

Were her beating, cursing, abuse and angry shouts not a justifiable defense, and not just what Wu Wei deserved?

Who could dare say she's brutal! Another woman in her position might go even further.

However, Wu Wei would not return her attack. She warded off one blow after another, convincing Bai Fan that she was pretending to retreat in order to advance. She redoubled her hatred for Wu Wei for falling into her trap.

Even if she drove Wu Wei into a fatal position, so what? She was still utterly shattered by the unresponsiveness of Wu Wei. Hu Bingchen had disarmed her long ago for the advantage of Wu Wei.

Wu Wei could do nothing but parry her blows.

She knew perfectly well that she had snatched another's beloved. And what can a person who took another's beloved say when confronted?

She had no alternative but to seize him. At the time she thought she was pulling the man from the tigress's mouth, but later she knew things were not that simple.

Besides, Hu Bingchen was suffering from a severe chronic illness, and any excitement would probably lead to his death in the twinkling of an eye.

Could she justify herself, as Bai Fan did, to resort to violence and carry things to their conclusion?

But Bai Fan's way of fighting was truly an eye-opener. So, women can also come to blows like this! Suddenly, she thought of the incompetent women of the Ye family. Had Ye Lianzi even one tenth of Bai Fan's boldness, she would not have been reduced to a state where she could do nothing but allow herself to be sliced up piece by piece

In the face of Bai Fan's versatile all-out attack, she could only stutter, "You, you, how can you hit people like this?"

Bai Fan leaned intently toward her face, "The one I want to beat is you, you whore. What can you do to me? Dare you go to the local police to report your injuries?"

In a flurry, she spun around to look at Hu Bingchen, who pulled a long face as if a deaf mute. Squeezed between these two, who were more experienced and skilled in

dealing with conflict, and who cherished even bolder visions than she in all aspects, Wu Wei was at a loss as to what to do and what to say.

Hu Bingchen watched, as mute as a fish, as Wu Wei was ground to dust little by little by Bai Fan's overwhelming power, making her defense or escape impossible. Wu Wei had to forgive his silence because he was on his last gasp and really could do nothing helpful.

But at least he could say that she came to the hospital at his request.

Although afterwards Hu Bingchen explained, "...At that time, the best thing you could do was to go away silently. Otherwise it would spread around to all departments and divisions of the hospital, and we would be a laughing-stock... it could even go to the local police station. The police would definitely initiate an investigation by all units, which would undoubtedly humiliate and inhibit us." Wu Wei still could not totally dismiss this from her mind. Considerate as Hu Bingchen was, why did he choose to keep silent about the disaster caused by his own request that Wu Wei come to the hospital to see him?

Even if Hu Bingchen had made it clear who was to blame, would Bai Fan be lenient toward her?

Bai Fan had no choice but to fight for her interests. After her baptism by long years manifold battles, she dealt with issues of principle endangering her immediate interests both vigorously and resolutely, just as the Changjiang River surges toward the east.

Wu Wei had never been a match for Bai Fan, nor would she ever be.

What happened later would demonstrate this.

Even so, Wu Wei still acted upon whatever Hu Bingchen said –

"You are a little fairy maiden, while I am merely a mortal, just an old hand muddling along for years in the administrative departments. Please believe that I am capable of dealing with matters, and let me take care of this issue which is really not a writer's business.

Hu Bingchen was right. As he often said to Wu Wei: No matter how tough a thing is, as long as you are steadfast and persevering, you'll win.

Had Wu Wei not been forbearing and conciliatory, Hu Bingchen definitely expected Bai Fan to take any offense as a pretext to fabricate trouble. In such events, not only would he and Wu Wei have an even slimmer future, but Wu Wei herself would sink even faster into the abyss of misery.

Whether still seriously ill or recovered, Hu Bingchen was the one person whom Wu Wei would die to protect. "I'm sick and cannot live long, please give me this last little bit of freedom" was undoubtedly Hu Bingchen's lever. He used this excuse to divorce Wei Wu. He also used it to divorce Bai Fan. In everyday life, he also put overweening pressure on them -- who's to blame if women have no heart to see their beloved suffer?

Wu Wei had to endure Bai Fan's attack for the sake of Hu Bingchen, who was seriously ill. In addition, she had to withstand heavy blows from both Bai Fan and Hu Bingchen's enemies.

Her situation was so dangerous!

No matter how difficult her situation was, this "second year college student forever", void of resource and astuteness in Hu Bingchen's eyes, stuck to her principle of never betraying him. A mere letter from him could not only rescue her from that treacherous

marsh, it could even get her opportunities that people around him dreamt and schemed for day and night if only she would turn against him.

How true! When Hu Bingchen had just been promoted to Vice Minister, Xu Dezhong and Chang Mei, husband and wife, who never sought publicity and still behave like intelligence agents habitually hidden from view, who show up only at the critical moment, immediately came to congratulate them with a bottle of high-quality wine. Obviously, that bottle of wine had been stored away for many years, which made the occasion to open it seem even grander. Wu Wei still remembered that when raising his glass in gratitude to the couple, Hu Bingchen displayed self-satisfaction, even though he was thinking with no lack of acerbity, “They’ve moved fast, as if fearing not to be first in line.”

However, Wu Wei said, “Don’t worry. I’m not going to use any magic powers against them. I’ll just grit my teeth and zip my mouth, that’s all.”

Wu Wei’s loyalty and Bai Fan’s betrayal triggered all sorts of feelings in Hu Bingchen’s mind. If Bai Fan’s attack was comprehensible, then her betrayal was unforgivable and revealed unfaithfulness of character.

He had once said to Wu Wei, “I’ve made up my mind to rent a hut near the reform-through-labor farm if you are forced to receive “reform” through labor. Good thing that grains and vegetables are available in the free market. I can get by as long as my retirement salary continues. I’ll also subscribe to some magazines and buy some books. I don’t mind staying there for several years.”

Did Hu Bingchen, so generous and affectionate, even once consider what to do if he were without a retirement salary? There was no harm in renting a hut near the farm. But how would Wu Wei feel -- a scapegoat subjected to several years reform through labor?

What if this should happen, renting a hut near the reform-through-labor farm to be near Wu Wei through several years of “reform” could be done, but why did Hu Bingchen not consider helping Wu Wei by simply stepping forward to bravely tell the truth?

Hu Bingchen remained silent over the disaster caused by his request that Wu Wei visit him in the hospital because it was only a trivial fact in his own life-and-death struggle. Can anyone imagine a commander in the battlefield, where every inch of land must be contested amid flaming gunfire, feeling sorrowful over the bombardment of a house? Would he rather lose the opportunity of wiping out the enemy than let his gunfire bypass that house, even one built three centuries ago? That was really only a theme for fiction. Wu Wei never asked much of Hu Bingchen, she could accept a mere “Sorry for making you suffer” from him, but he said nothing. Perhaps it is too much to expect from a commander. Since Hu Bingchen was already determined to stand by her through “reform”, why quibble over a cliché without any substance?

In addition, love means you need not say “sorry”. Even if things reach the extent at which “Sorry” should be said, it’s really voluntary on both sides, just as in the ploy where Huang Gai was voluntarily beaten by Zhou Yu.⁵⁹ Only women themselves know whether or not it serves them well.

⁵⁹ A famous ruse of self-injury devised by Zhou Yu周瑜 (175-210) and Wang Gai黄盖, generals of Wu吴 during the Redcliff Battle in 208 A.D to deceive Cao Cao曹操 (155-220).

Wu Wei failed to understand Hu Bingchen's strategy in treating her that way. Perhaps it was like Ju-ge Liang tearfully beheading Ma Su.⁶⁰ Like most women, she lacks the self-possession to consider the overall situation on such occasions. She felt wronged. She could not live up to Hu Bingchen's expectations, "You are going to be like the spouse in a Prime Minister's family or the wife of a Vice Minister. You must have the magnanimity and imposing manner befitting such a family."

This was not merely joking. His family line, faded by the ravages of wind and rain over several hundred years, had been influencing Hu Bingchen's life, just like the stairs Wu Wei encountered when she was two years old.

In the fight for power, the official rank of Hu Bingchen, who inadvertently turned out to be the victim, was gone forever, just like a crane, never to return. Consciously or unconsciously, the melancholy or eternal regret for a long-gone past, and weariness of falling prey to plots, had been deeply branded on his mind.

Besides now and then feeling that his romance with Wu Wei was full of symmetry and harmony, like the level-oblique tone contrasts in classical Chinese poetry, there is no way to know whether Hu Bingchen also felt unexpected joy at finding a bosom female friend, ready to lay down her life for him if necessary.

Her incomprehension turned out to be an unexpected turning point. For many years, Wu Wei had not taken those little clues to heart, those incomprehensible things that appeared to be accidental but which had gradually assembled, even though still fuzzy at present.

⁶⁰ Alludes to an episode in the novel *Three Kingdoms*. In 228, Ju-ge Liang 诸葛亮 (181-234) appointed Ma Su 马谡, a man not equal to the job, to guard the strategically important Jie Ting 街亭, northeast of present-day Qing'an 秦安 county, Gansu 甘肃 Province. As a result, Jie Ting fell and Ju-ge Liang reluctantly had to have Ma Su beheaded in order to enforce and maintain strict military discipline.

As when Hu Bingchen asked her to visit him in the hospital, Wu Wei won't take such a risk again.

Starting from this event, she will no longer grant whatever is requested of her. Bai Fan surely did not expect that the byproduct of their fight was much more powerful and effective in ruining the love between Wu Wei and Hu Bingchen than her full face attack.

2

Those rumors were certainly not the product of Hu Bingchen's old adversaries. Those big shots had long ago lost interest in Wu Wei, Hu Bingchen's current "ex-wife". They had shown extreme interest in her merely because they wanted to use her to find a chink in Hu Bingchen's armor. Now, not only Hu Bingchen, but also his opponents, suddenly became things of the past.

Time is more than heartless, it is just cruel!

3

She was unwilling to believe that Hu Bingchen did this. Though separated, their feelings of gratitude and resentment could not be severed by a divorce certificate.

But Wu Wei could also understand Hu Bingchen doing it. In the face of those rumors, he was unavoidably embarrassed, as well as timid, even though he repeatedly claimed that he had never cared about so-called public opinion.

According to the established social mentality, it was, of course, Wu Wei who had abandoned Hu Bingchen because she was the younger of the pair. However, senile as Hu Bingchen is now, he can still accurately grasp the social mentality of the masses. He went

through the divorce in such an unhurried and easy manner that Wu Wei could not help acclaiming his deportment as the acme of perfection

Still, Wu Wei must feel sad – How could Hu Bingchen leave nothing to her? He could at least have let her feel that her twenty-odd years of love for him was not totally worthless. Again, she thought of that mysterious half-woman half-beast shadow, those extremely charming eyes with the deep-seated hatred, which had often silently flicked across her face. Each time it skimmed over, it took something from her --- until she had nothing left. Sometimes she recognized it, very clear but fleeting. Then the clarity of her feelings became hazy again.

Its appearance was so unexpected that it endlessly intervened in her life with Hu Bingchen, even during their lovemaking, just like the huge bat of her girlhood. It would always wait for her under the eaves and fly across her forehead as she stood by the hall of the Danyang (Red Sun) Temple on the Loess Plateau waiting for the arrival of the dependable dusk, looking forward to enjoying its solitude. Its shadow also intervened in the solitary watch that belonged to her and the dusk, and made the sky dimmer.

Now, it has finally won and gotten revenge!

4

Objectively speaking, rumors of this kind were not accidental. If the cause-effect creating such rumors did not befall Wu Wei, always plagued by scandals, or, to put it more kindly, mockery, wherever she went, then on whom else?

Just like a thief who had long ago stopped stealing. However, someone suffering loss by theft would naturally first think of him before the truth came to light. Even the real thief would take the lead in mocking and humiliating him in order to clear himself. The ex-thief is fully aware of people's suspicions but there is no way to defend himself. If he pleaded innocence, he would inevitably fall into the stereotyped trap of "having a guilty conscience as a thief" or "No three hundred taels of silver buried here!"

Her friends said the reason for her plight is that she is inflexible, but Wu Wei didn't think so. She just thought she was not good at dealing with people.

From her experience and performance when responding to disasters, she became excessively timid, not ordinarily timid but extremely chicken-hearted. But by appearance, she fears nothing. Ordinary people would find it extremely difficult to understand that when a person can do nothing due to timidity or bashfulness, he will cover up his helplessness with fearlessness or recklessness – or perhaps shamelessness.

But deep down, she believed, from start to finish, that the greatest lessons in the world are how to deal with people, and that people are the most fearsome beasts in the world. You never know when, where, and how he'll attack you. When facing guns or beasts, you always know where the danger is and from which direction it will come. Even on the verge of death, you also know how you will die.

It is said that animals won't attack if not hungry. However, man attacks his fellows without necessarily any reason at all. Perhaps your existence alone is perceived as some sort of obstacle -- Existence can imply some possibility of success. Or perhaps just trampling on others is a tortuous expression of a shameful motive. Or maybe none of above -- just that your son-in-law is five centimeters taller than his... Wu Wei always said

reverentially “A grasp of mundane affairs is genuine knowledge, and worldly wisdom is true learning” is an enduring aphorism, but she has had difficulty in practicing it all her life. She just consoles herself, “One’s ability or inability to do something is innate.”

Conversely, there are also real reasons why a person becomes the target of public criticism. Wu Wei’s theory on beasts was just her extreme way of talking. Readers could easily see all kinds of flaws here and there in her works, which is one of the reasons she failed to become known as one of the best writers.

Did the person who could make a phone call like this really care about right or wrong?

Wu Wei originally intended just to say “Thanks for calling” to that old acquaintance of Hu Bingchen. As it turned out, she said, “Yep. You are right. I did remarry a man more wealthy and influential than Old Hu.”

To her surprise, the caller responded admiringly, though jokingly, “Oh...Oh...Then you must have a lot of money, right?”

She half-heartedly replied, “Oh – not that much, maybe only several millions.”

Can it make any difference whether or not it was she who proposed divorce?

Now that things have come to such a pass, how much is so-called “public opinion” worth? Could they really do anything against her?

Had she not endured unfair treatment all her life? Had she even treated her mother and daughter shabbily in order to achieve a status that would bring her fair treatment? In the end, had it not turned out that those two also fell into the dismembering grasp of others?

She placed too much hope on this society!

If anyone has an emotional complex that cannot be resolved, then this is probably hers: Since every injustice has its perpetrator and every debt has its debtor, why was such unparalleled cruel humiliation also inflicted on her innocent mother and child?

Can it make any difference whether or not it was she who proposed divorce?

In any case she has lost Hu Bingchen rather than the opposite. Hanging up the telephone, Wu Wei went to the supermarket and bought a carton of milk.

Back home, she sluggishly grabbed the telephone book. Would she make a phone call to pour out her pent up feelings after those two calls earlier in the morning? It seemed so, and it seemed not. From beginning to end, she randomly skimmed the names and the telephone numbers behind them, and finally made no calls. She was also pondering –

Shall I change into a fashionable dress and dine out at a pleasant place to once again verify the indestructible essence of my powerful unconstraint and aloofness?

Or go buy a bouquet of fresh flowers to arrange in artfully elegant colors by myself?

Or just pick up the newspapers and magazines strewn all over the floor, clean the dusty room, wipe off the dust laden furniture...

Or as usual, just try to make others, especially myself, believe that she's living a colorful life? In the end, she gave up the idea of acting out her usually effective sham.

There was a moment when she was even anticipating the ring of another phone call, one even more insidious than the previous two.

Again she chatted with herself, "Do you think you should go watch a ballet?"

"Of course!"

"Is a ticket easily available?" "I need to go to the hospital and grab some sleeping pills."

“There is now a new medicine that seems effective.” “What medicine?”

Later she read aloud in English for a while;

She derived great pleasure from turning on the hi-fi and amplifying the volume

The house started to bustle with noise and excitement...

She smiled a sinister and vicious smile, walked into the bathroom, scrutinized her face in the mirror --evil like that of an orphaned wolf. In her endlessly perilous situation, she's already been totally abandoned. She is incurable and hopeless. She has to be alone.

In a flash, a lot of big yellow teeth were reflected in the mirror. Those teeth, confident of success, were unhurriedly pressing in behind her. Her entire body was gripped in those big yellow teeth. She felt heart-piecing pain.

Turning abruptly, she struggled to escape from those teeth, only to bump headlong into the wall. Blood zigzagged downwards from her forehead, adding a touch of restrained gracefulness, or even some seductiveness, to her face, which remained expressionless for a long time.

In pain, she regained consciousness. They were ceramic tiles rather than teeth! Anyway they looked exactly like rows of teeth – not unlike those big yellow front teeth unique to the Japanese during the Anti-Japanese War. After more than half a century of racial evolution and progress in dentistry, Japanese no longer have those big yellow incisors that stick out like those of crickets. But the Japanese during the war of aggression looked really awkward with such huge incisors. Those teeth in her bathroom, not only big and yellow, not only protruding like those of crickets, but also with ingrained yellow tartar embedded between them. She grab a chisel with the confident intention of getting rid of that tartar, when it suddenly dawned on her that she cannot dig it out of so many

teeth and tooth-spaces. She picked up a chisel and a hammer, prying and chipping, and broke those teeth into pieces one after another.

She did all this in a quiet, unhurried manner, not crazy at all.

After this, she felt only a little bit tired. She lit a cigarette, and called it “Baby” in a low voice, and shouted loudly to the sky, “Ma!”

Smoking feels really good. Now in her most relaxing moments, the thing dearest to her heart is to smoke a cigarette that harbors neither pity nor malice towards her.

She sat in front of the bathroom door, looking at those huge broken yellow teeth, while contemplating the unfathomable affairs of human life –Indeed! In a flash, those huge yellow teeth were broken, just as a constant companion suddenly appears in a coffin.

Turning around, she saw a man wearing a black gauze cap and court dress enter the room. His face was devoid of eyebrows, eyes, nose, and mouth; it was just like a bare board engraved with square script, vertically and horizontally, whose every hooked stroke was engraved as thickly as a stick of incense.

That bare face engraved with square script tracked her silently, pacing back and forth in the room with her. Turning around, she bent down to that face, “What is written on it?”

But she could not understand any of it.

From then on she asked everyone she met, “Can you tell me what is written on that face?”

... ..

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